

One-stop shop rejection disappoints farmers

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THE National Farmers' Federation (NFF) is disappointed that the Senate looks likely to block the legislation required to establish 'one-stop shops' for environmental approvals.

The Government had proposed to amend the complex national environmental law - the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) - by establishing a one-stop shop in each state and territory.

The NFF supports the one-stop shop reform, saying it would streamline environment laws and go a long way to ending the confusion of many farmers about their legal responsibilities.

"The Palmer United Party missed an opportunity to convert the party's positive sentiments about farmers into meaningful action.

Instead, together with their Senate colleagues, they have chosen to put politics ahead of the interests of Australian farmers," said NFF President Brent Finlay.

"The Labor Party, having initiated the reform to a one-stop shop policy when in Government, has now chosen to turn its back on the opportunity to create clearer environmental regulatory arrangements for farmers.

"The one-stop shops would have given farmers the certainty that the advice they receive from state regulators would also include advice on their obligations under the EPBC Act.

The Senate's likely decision to vote down the legislation is a step backwards for farmers," Mr Finlay said.

Given that one-stop shops look unlikely to proceed, the NFF urges Environment Minister Greg Hunt and the Government to commit to:

* A comprehensive program to improve farmer awareness of their responsibilities under the EPBC Act, particularly when these responsibilities change with a newly listed threatened species.

* Streamlining the way that farmers seek formal advice to know whether the EPBC Act applies to them.

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* Reconsidering the current offsets policy – to make the EPBC Act more workable for farmers.

“All of these steps can be taken within the current legislation, and we look forward to continuing discussions with Minister Hunt to make federal environmental laws more workable for farmers,” Mr Finlay said.

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