

IS GOVERNMENT GETTING GOOD ADVICE?

Is there a conflict of interest when the 'independent' environmental consultants Federal Government relies on to provide advice about development proposals are paid by industry?

Could it be that consultants have a financial interest to ensure that development applications are approved?

It is highly unlikely that consultants would recommend anything other than the development's approval. If a consultant says anything that might stop the approval of a development, they will probably never work again.

Compounding the problem is the fact that environmental legislation is often based on opinion rather than clear facts. Consultants do not have to show development will not have an impact; they just have to say they believe there will not be an impact.

Unlike many professions, environmental consultants have no governing body. Consultants do not need to be registered. There are no clear regulations or codes of conduct, and no disciplinary body.

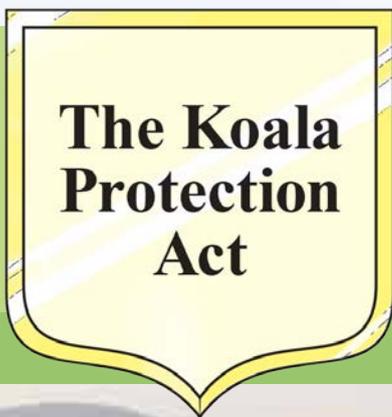


How then can the opinion of environmental consultants be considered independent?

In some cases these 'independent' consultants are failing in their duty to properly assess proposed developments and the Federal Government either lacks the expertise to identify problems, or simply does not care.



This area of bushland was mapped by consultants as the critically endangered White box woodland ecological community. The consultant got it wrong – these trees are narrow-leaved ironbark. Why does this matter? This area is a proposed offset. The proponent planned to clear an area of critically endangered White box woodland, and offered to compensate for clearing by protecting this relatively common vegetation.



The Koala Protection Act (KPA) will require truly independent environmental assessments, removing conflicts of interest. It will ensure that decision makers are provided with high-quality, accurate information.