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Port Adelaide Demands AFL Action as Racism Persists

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Australia's outdated environmental laws are stifling economic growth, and urgent reform of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act is essential to boost productivity and meet critical national goals, warns former Treasury Secretary Ken Henry. His call highlights the need for streamlined regulations that balance economic progress with environmental protection.

Speaking at the National Press Club on 16 July 2025, Henry, now chair of the Australian Climate and Biodiversity Foundation (ACBF), declared, “Reforming our broken environmental laws is an obvious lever to enhance resilience and lift moribund productivity growth.” He argued that the EPBC Act, unchanged for over two decades, fails to support Australia’s ambitions for net-zero emissions by 2050 and building 1.2 million homes by 2029. The 2020 Samuel Review found the Act ineffective, with project approvals often delayed by years, choking industries such as mining and renewables. Henry emphasised that without reform, these targets are unattainable, stating, “There is no chance of Australia meeting stated targets for net zero, renewable energy, critical minerals development, housing, and transport infrastructure without very high-quality national laws.”

The Labor government’s delays in overhauling the EPBC Act have drawn criticism. Environment Minister Murray Watt has prioritised establishing a federal Environment Protection Agency (EPA), but its scope remains unclear, and a reform bill is not expected for at least 18 months. Business leaders argue the Act’s bureaucratic hurdles deter investment, with renewable energy and housing projects facing costly delays. Henry warned against simply speeding up approvals without addressing cumulative environmental impacts, calling it “simply nuts” to assess projects in isolation. He advocated for national environmental standards to streamline decisions while protecting nature.

Critics of the Albanese government contend its focus on climate rhetoric over practical reforms exacerbates Australia’s productivity slump, which Henry noted has cut average incomes by 40% over two decades. A robust EPA with clear standards could reduce costs and boost efficiency,

but Labor's slow progress risks further economic stagnation. As Australia grapples with environmental decline and economic challenges, Henry's push for reform demands urgent action to secure a prosperous, sustainable future.