



Dr Coral Rowston
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Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland

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Dear Dr Rowston

Thank you for your correspondence to the Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, concerning the assessment of new and expanding coal mines under the *Environment Protection Act 1994* (Qld). Minister Plibersek has asked me to thank you for your correspondence and to reply on her behalf.

I acknowledge your concerns about the Queensland Government's regulatory assessment process, in particular the approach to scaling proposals, potentially resulting in lower scrutiny of a project's impact. You provide the Vulcan South Coal Project and the Isaac River Coal Mine as particular examples. I also note your view that the Australian Government has an opportunity to address these issues through our environmental reform agenda.

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that Australia's national environmental laws are outcomes-focused and nature positive, whilst also establishing trust and transparency amongst the Australian community.

The Queensland Government has the primary responsibility for the assessment and approval of coal mining projects in Queensland. Projects likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance require assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) before the project can commence. Where the bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments applies, the department works closely with Queensland to ensure that the impacts on matters of national environmental significance are thoroughly assessed before a decision on approval is made.

The decision-making process includes consideration of matters raised by the public on the assessment documentation, advice received from the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development (IESC), cumulative impacts associated with expansion activities and conditions imposed by other agencies and social and economic matters.

The department is currently assessing the Isaac River Coal Project for impacts to protected matters. The decision on whether to approve the proposal will consider the conditions imposed under Queensland's Environmental Authority. Additional conditions may be imposed where these are required to protect matters of national environmental significance.

The department has been made aware of the proposed Gemini Coal Project near Dingo. This proposal is currently being reviewed by the department to determine if referral and approval is

required before it can proceed. The Vulcan South Mine Project was approved with conditions under the EPBC Act in March 2022.

The Australian Government is committed to reforming Australia's environmental laws to better protect, restore and manage our unique environment. These reforms include delivering better environmental protection and laws that are nature positive, making it easier for companies to do the right thing and restoring integrity and trust to systems and environmental laws.

The Australian Government is working closely with stakeholders and partners, including state and territory governments, to develop a package of new environmental legislation to implement our reform priorities. There will be opportunities for the public to provide comment on various aspects of the reform agenda. I encourage you to be involved. Further information can be found on the department's website at www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/epbc-act-reform. I would also encourage you to continue to engage with the Queensland Government on the issues you have raised.

Thank you again for bringing your concerns to the Government's attention.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Say', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark Say
Acting Assistant Secretary
Environment Assessments Queensland and Sea Dumping Branch
18 February 2023