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3 December 2024

Attention: Assessment Manager

**Re: Submission on the proposed amendment to Environmental Authority application (A-EA-AMD-100627125) for the Dawson South Coal Mine**

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission on the proposed Environmental Authority (EA) amendment for the Dawson South coal mine (**the Project**) operated by Anglo Coal (Dawson South) Pty Ltd and Mitsui Moura Investment Pty Ltd (**the Proponent**).

Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland (**EnvA**) is a regional association committed to promoting sustainable land use practices that minimise environmental harm. We are particularly concerned about the impacts of coal mining, coal seam gas, and climate change in Central Queensland.

EnvA believes that opening new or expanding existing coal and gas projects:

- Is likely to cause irreparable damage to the local landscape and endanger numerous threatened species and ecosystems on Central Queensland,
- Contradicts Queensland and Australia's commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and
- Contributes to the acceleration of climate change, which has direct, adverse effects on local communities, vulnerable species, and coastal ecosystems.

## The Project

The Dawson South Mine is a large-scale open cut metallurgical and thermal coal mine located approximately 6 km east of Moura and 145km west of Gladstone. The mine consists of four open cut pits (Pits 25, 26, 27 and 28) located within Mining Leases (**ML**) 5657, 80160 and 80161.

The Proponent has recently completed a detailed Life-of-Mine (**LOM**) planning and design for the final landform for Dawson South Mine as part of the preparation of the Progressive Rehabilitation and Closure Plan (**PRCP**). The key objective of the PRCP LOM planning was to avoid the need for Non-use Management Areas (**NUMAs**), or if not possible, minimise their size.

In the current Dawson South Mine EA (EPML00657413), a NUMA of up to 169ha is approved for Pit 28. The Proponent claims that the PRCP LOM planning process confirmed that due to a



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combination of the Pit 25 LOM mining schedule and the quantity of available overburden in proximity to the final pit, it would not be feasible to completely backfill Pit 25.

As such, the current Project seeks to amend the EA to include a residual final void NUMA in Pit 25, in addition to Pit 28, noting that the total combined final void NUMA would remain within the existing approved 169 ha limit.

## **EnvA's concerns about this Project**

### **Non-Compliance with Queensland's Regulatory Requirements for NUMAs**

The Queensland Government's regulatory requirements and guidelines<sup>1</sup> for assessing proposed NUMAs under the EA Act<sup>2</sup> require that the Proponent clearly demonstrate that:

1. Rehabilitating the land would cause a greater risk of environmental harm than not rehabilitating, or
2. (a) The risk of environmental harm as a result of not carrying out rehabilitation of the land is confined to the area of the relevant resource tenure; and  
(b) The applicant considers, having regard to each public interest consideration, that it is in the public interest for the land not to be rehabilitated to a stable condition.

EnvA believes that the Proponent has not adequately met these regulatory requirements. Specifically:

1. The Proponent has not made a reasonable or evidence-based claim that rehabilitating the land would cause greater environmental harm than not rehabilitating the land.
2. (a) The Proponent has not demonstrated that the risks associated with the proposed NUMA's will be confined to the area of the relevant ML.
  - EnvA further notes that the salinity of the water within the proposed final void NUMAs will increase over time due to evaporative concentration and the predicted Total Dissolved Solids after 100 years are well in excess of the guideline values for livestock drinking water.
  - While the proposed NUMAs are outside of the current Dawson River flood plain, they are located within two kilometres of the 0.1% flood extent. Weather patterns have significantly changed due to the impacts of climate change, and it is very possible that with the more intense droughts and rainfall events, that:
    - The exceedance of predicted maximum void lake water levels may lead to the overflow of contaminated water within the final void NUMAs. The Proponent claims that "the void lakes are not likely to overflow to the downstream environment", but there is no modelling of this with the acknowledgement of changed weather patterns,
    - The extent of the flood plain may expand and directly connect with the proposed final void NUMAs, or
    - The stability of the NUMA may be impacted over time, particularly as the management and maintenance of the voids and drain-lines falls to the landholder. The application does not clearly outline the financial assurances or mechanisms that will ensure long-term management and monitoring of the void.

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<sup>1</sup> [Non-Use Management Areas – Information Sheet](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Queensland Environment Protection Act 1994, Section 126D\(2\)](#)

2. (b) The Proponent has not adequately addressed public interest considerations. Instead, their focus appears to be on reducing rehabilitation costs. EnvA strongly asserts that leaving land unrehabilitated, especially when it could pose future environmental risks, is not in the public interest and will not serve the needs of future generations.

The Proponent has not provided any meaningful justification on how this Project is consistent with the legislative requirements associated with PRCPs.

### **Justification for the proposed NUMAs**

The Proponent's justification for not backfilling or rehabilitating the mine voids is vague and lacks sufficient detail. They claim that due to the Pit 25 mining schedule and overburden availability, it is not feasible to fully backfill Pit 25, and therefore, a residual final void NUMA is necessary.

The Proponent has previously emphasised its commitment to best-practice mine rehabilitation and delivering outstanding results at the Dawson Mine, including completed rehabilitation of an area previously containing voids to a final landform.<sup>3</sup>

EnvA also notes that the Proponent also has also lodged an EA amendment for the Dawson Central and North mine sites (A-EA-AMD-100633359) which proposes a further six mine void NUMAs covering an area of 1650ha. Combined with the NUMAs provided in the current Project, a total of 1819ha of NUMAs is proposed for the Dawson Coal Mine Complex.

This suggests that the Proponent's push for NUMAs may be financially motivated, particularly ahead of the anticipated sale of the Dawson Mine to Delta Dunia Group through its subsidiary, BUMA International and Peabody.<sup>4</sup> If rehabilitation obligations are tied to this transaction, it raises significant concerns about the true motivations behind these proposals.

EnvA strongly believes that the long-term environmental and social impacts have not been adequately justified and that a longer-term, sustainable rehabilitation outcome is required, particularly when there is no clear justification on why NUMAs are the only option available.

### **Additional comments on NUMAs for Pits 28 and 25**

EnvA understands that excavation at Pit 28 has not yet commenced, but the NUMA for this pit has already been approved. The Proponent seeks to reduce the surface area of the NUMA associated with Pit 28 which we support should the EA amendment be granted.

However, the justification provided for the proposed Pit 25 NUMA is questionable. We note that in response to a request for further information<sup>5</sup>, the Proponent has intimated that overburden has already been placed out of pit on the low wall and "that any attempts to remine and haul the placed overburden on the low wall back in the void will disturb any rehabilitation achieved to date and may cause greater environmental harm than leaving it in situ."

This argument appears inconsistent with the current EA, which does not approve a post-mine void NUMA for Pit 25 and raises concerns about whether the Proponent is attempting to circumvent regulatory requirements for rehabilitation.

In either scenario, there is no detail to clarify or justify the requirement for a post mine void NUMA for Pit 25, noting that it was this Pit which the Proponent has highlighted as a rehabilitation success for a post mining land use for grazing<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> [Mine Rehabilitation Case Study: Dawson Mine](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Delta Dunia Group, through BUMA International, agrees to acquire a controlling interest in the Dawson Coal Mining Complex, 25 November 2024](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Supporting information: Dawson South EA-Amendment Response to Information Request](#)

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, EnvA strongly submits that the proposed NUMA for Pit 25 should be rejected, as it is inconsistent with regulatory requirements, does not serve the public interest, and lacks sufficient justification from the Proponent. There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that NUMAs are the most appropriate or environmentally responsible option for Pit 25, and the long-term risks have not been adequately addressed.

We urge the Assessment Manager to refuse the proposed EA amendment for the Dawson South Coal Mine.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Coral Rowston**

Director

Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland