

Our reference: CTS 08652/26

22 May 2026

Dr Coral Rowston
Director
Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland Inc
enva.cq@outlook.com

Dear Dr Rowston

Thank you for your letter of 27 April 2026 to the Honourable Andrew Powell MP, Minister for the Environment and Tourism and Minister for Science and Innovation regarding impacts of coal mine water releases in the Fitzroy Basin. The Minister has asked me to respond on his behalf.

The current mine water release framework was developed in response to significant flood events between 2010 and 2012 and incorporates recommendations from the 2012 Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry. Between 2012 and 2016, the Queensland Government piloted an enhanced mine water release program, which demonstrated that controlled releases could be effectively managed without adversely impacting water quality for ecosystems, agriculture, or domestic use.

The Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (the department) understands the importance of protecting water quality and works closely with other agencies to manage, monitor and mitigate impacts during extreme weather events. Initiatives like the Reef Water Quality Report Card and regional partnerships, such as the Fitzroy Partnership for River Health, play a key role in tracking progress and guiding future actions. Since 2010, the Fitzroy Basin has shown steady improvement in water quality, with the most recent report card scoring an overall grade of 'B' (Good). Based on this progress, the department considers the current framework effective and does not intend to review it at this stage.

We appreciate your concerns regarding mine water releases from the Ensham and Peak Downs coal mines. The department has carefully reviewed the examples you raised and found that conductivity levels from both mines remained below historic levels and within regulatory limits. While the number of coal mines in the catchment has increased, the framework continues to manage releases effectively and responsibly.

The 2025–2026 wet season, driven by La Niña conditions and ex-Tropical Cyclones Koji and Narelle, was the ninth wettest since 1900, resulting in significant flooding across many catchments. During this period, Central Queensland coal mines conducted 111 authorised mine water releases into the Fitzroy Basin, which accounted for approximately 0.6% of the Fitzroy River's total flow past Rockhampton.

Additionally, ten Temporary Emission Licences (TELs) were issued to seven coal mines to manage surplus water responsibly and safely. For example, Oaky Creek mine conducted two releases under TELs to address serious safety risks caused by heavy rainfall. These TELs, issued under strict conditions, are publicly available through the department's Public Register Portal which can be found at apps.des.qld.gov.au/public-register/.

We recognise that mine water releases can be a sensitive issue. These releases are essential for managing water during high rainfall, preventing safety risks, production disruptions and water quality decline on-site. The increased natural water flows during heavy rainfall help dilute releases, minimising environmental impacts. Where non-compliance is identified, the department takes action in line with its Enforcement Guidelines, ensuring accountability and appropriate remediation.

As you are aware, under their environmental authority, Fitzroy Basin coal mines are required to notify the department of mine water releases, which are published on the department's website at environment.qld.gov.au/management/activities/mining/mine-water-releases/current. In addition, hourly water quality data is available via the Water Monitoring Information Portal on the Queensland Government website at water-monitoring.information.qld.gov.au and detailed 28-day reports can be accessed through the Public Register upon request.

Thank you for raising your concerns about the impacts of coal mine water releases in the Fitzroy Basin. The department remains committed to monitoring and managing these releases in collaboration with industry, regional partnerships and stakeholders to ensure the ongoing health of the Fitzroy Basin. We value your engagement on this important issue.

Should you require any further information, you may contact Cate Puschmann, Manager – Compliance, Environmental Services and Regulation of the department on 04315 444 09 or by email at cate.puschmann@detsi.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Jackie McKeay
**Acting Deputy Director-General
Environmental Services and Regulation**