

Hon Murray Watt
Minister for the Environment
Email: Minister.watt@dcceew.gov.au

CC: epbc.referrals@dcceew.gov.au
CoalCorporateAffairs@bhp.com

19 June 2026

Dear Minister Watt

RE: Concerns about the response to public submission on Preliminary Documentation for the Peak Downs Mine Power Line Realignment Project (EPBC 2024/09983)

We write to you in relation to our submission¹ made in relation to the invitation to comment on the Preliminary Documentation for Peak Downs Mine Power Line Realignment Project (**the Project**) by BM Alliance Coal Operations Pty Ltd (**the Proponent**) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*.

The Proponent has provided its Response to Public Comment Submissions² and has published the final preliminary documentation - taking into account request for further information³ from the Department of Environment, Energy, Climate Change and Water (the Department) and comments made in public submissions.

It is EnvA's view that the Proponent has not adequately addressed the matters raised in public submissions. As such, we respectfully request that the Department independently review the submissions received during the assessment of this Project and not rely solely on the Proponent's interpretation of the issues raised, particularly where significant concerns remain unresolved or inadequately addressed.

Further detail on our concerns with the Proponent's attention to the comments raised in public submissions is provided below.

Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland

By way of background, Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland (**EnvA**) is a Central Queensland association concerned about the risks associated with coal mining, coal seam gas and climate change.

EnvA is concerned about the significant impacts on the environment stemming from the high numbers of new and expanding coal and coal seam gas projects in Central Queensland, particularly the impacts on threatened species, water quality and the resulting greenhouse gas emissions.

¹ [EnvA \(18 April 2026\) Submission on Preliminary Documentation for the Peak Downs Mine Power Line Realignment Project \(EPBC 2024/09983\)](#)

² [BMA \(1 June 2026\) Appendix I. Response to Public Comment Submissions](#)

³ [BMA \(22 May 2026\) Response to DEECCW's request for further information](#)



The proposed project

The Project seeks to realign three powerlines (7N/5N/2N) to facilitate the continuation of approved mining activities at the Peak Downs Mine (PDM). The existing mine pits are progressing to the east and are approaching the exclusion limits to blasting for mining activities. The Project would realign the powerlines to the east of the current alignment, and would comprise the following three components:

- 7N power line realignment – entirely outside of a mining lease
- 5N power line realignment – partly within ML 70411, partly outside a mining lease
- 2N power line realignment – entirely within ML 70411.

EnvA's previous submissions on this project

From the outset, EnvA considered that there was insufficient information provided in the draft preliminary documentation and recommended that the project be assessed at a higher level (as outlined in our submission on the referral for assessment).⁴ Despite our recommendation, the project was deemed to be controlled action with listed threatened species and communities identified as controlling provisions, and was to be assessed on the preliminary documentation.

EnvA's submission on the preliminary documentation focussed on the threatened species and communities as the identified controlling provision but also raised concerns about this project in relation to the prohibition of "split referrals" under section 74A of the EPBC Act.

It is critically important to EnvA that the Department considers our submissions in line with current legislation and policy, rather than relying solely on the Proponent's interpretation of legislative requirements and the issues raised in public submissions.

Submission matters that have not been suitably addressed by the Proponent

Justification

EnvA stated that the Project cannot be justified without the approval and progression of the associated Peak Downs Continuation Project. The powerline realignment is functionally dependent on, and forms part of, the broader Peak Downs Mine Continuation Project. Assessing this Project separately risks fragmenting consideration of cumulative impacts. It is further noted that the Initial Advice Statement for Peak Mine Continuation Project which is currently subject to a bilateral assessment process also includes the relocation of a section of transmission line which may be a duplication of part of this Project.⁵

The Proponent's response was "noted" and further stated that the powerline realignment is necessary to maintain existing operations regardless of the Peak Mine Continuation Project. The Proponent also acknowledges that the proposed action is situated partly within an area that is already subject to assessment for the Peak Downs Mine Continuation Project (EPBC 2022/09350)⁶.

It is EnvA's view that, whether linked to the currently operating Peak Downs Mine or the proposed Peak Downs Mine Continuation Project, the powerline realignment is functionally dependent on broader mining operations. The existence of multiple applications relating to interconnected mining infrastructure raises concerns regarding the intent of section 74A of the EPBC Act and the prohibition on split referrals. Assessment of this Project in isolation risks fragmenting

⁴ [EnvA \(15 October 2024\) Submission on Referral - Peak Downs Mine Power Line Realignment Project \(EPBC 2024/09983\)](#)

⁵ [Office of the Coordinator General, Queensland Government.\(2026\) Peak Downs Mine Continuation Project](#)

⁶ [BMA \(5 March 2026\) Preliminary Documentation Report. Peak Downs Mine Power Line Realignment \(EPBC 2024/09983\)](#)

consideration of cumulative environmental impacts and does not adequately address the broader environmental consequences associated with continued mining operations.

EnvA also notes uncertainty regarding the economic justification for continued expansion of the Peak Downs Mine. Public statements by the Proponent regarding future investment priorities raise questions about the long-term economic assumptions underpinning the ongoing expansion of Peak Downs operations.^{7,8,9} This reinforces the importance of ensuring that environmental impacts are rigorously assessed and justified.

Commonwealth environmental assessment frameworks require consideration of environmental risks alongside claimed economic benefits. When considered in the context of the Peak Downs Mine Continuation Project, the inadequate offset proposal for this project, and uncertainty regarding long-term economic benefits, EnvA considers that the Project does not represent a balanced or justified outcome and requires further investigation by the Department.

Significant impacts on threatened species and communities

The proposed disturbance footprint covers a 12.66 km powerline realignment corridor encompassing approximately 83.55 ha of land which will, or has the potential to, impact on numerous threatened species and communities listed under the EPBC Act. Our concerns were outlined in our previous submissions on this project and should be considered in the Department's assessment of this Project.⁴

In our previous submissions, we noted that the species and communities that will be impacted by the project are regularly identified in applications for new and expanding coal mines in Central Queensland. The addition of the impacts of the project will add to the cumulative impacts of past and approved clearing of threatened species habitat.

Every hectare of threatened species habitat is now critical to protect to prevent the further decline in conservation status of species and ecological communities in Central Queensland. This is particularly relevant in the Bowen Basin, where multiple approved, operating and proposed coal mining developments continue to contribute to habitat loss and fragmentation. The cumulative effect of incremental habitat clearing is a critical consideration under the EPBC Act and should not be assessed solely at the scale of individual projects.

The Proponent has again 'noted' our concerns but ascertains that their assessment is in line with the MNES Significant Impact Guidelines as required by the EPBC Act – referring to sections of the draft preliminary documentation as evidence. However, we firmly believe that the concerns raised in our submission have not been addressed – only noted. In particular, the cumulative loss of habitat of threatened species and communities has not been addressed, and the identification of the substantial remnant vegetation that “will remain undisturbed and continue to provide habitat for threatened species”.

The proponent has made application for the proposed Peak Mines Continuation project and there are multiple proposed new and expanding coal projects within the area. EnvA considers the claim that remaining remnant vegetation will continue to provide habitat for threatened species and communities is unsupported – particularly as the proponent did not consider protecting these areas for its offset area³ which would have been preferable³ to the proposed offset area at a considerable distance from the project site.

⁷ [Mining and Energy Union \(29 August 2025\) Queensland shows how to get a fair return from resources](#)

⁸ [Courier Mail \(4 March 2026\) BHP doubles down despite latest twist](#)

⁹ [The Guardian \(17 September 2025\) Queensland deputy premier labels BHP 'unAustralian' as mining giant blames job cuts on coal royalties scheme](#)

Proposed offset management plan

The Proponent again noted and dismissed the concerns raised in our submission on the basis that they consider their proposed offset area aligns with the Department's Offsets Policy. EnvA's submission specifically identified inconsistencies between the EPBC Offsets Policy¹⁰ and the Proponent's proposed offset management plan (OMP).¹¹

Many of the matters EnvA raised in its submission were also addressed in the comments made by the second submitter along with additional specific comments which were again noted but were not directly addressed.

Key matters raised in the second submission which are additional to, or support EnvA's submission include:

The proposed offset area has no records of koalas in the area

Submitter 2 questioned the suitability of the offset area to deliver a conservation outcome for the koala. The proponent responded that it has included an interim performance target stating:

"If koala or greater glider have not once been detected following Year 2 surveys, a species expert will be engaged to develop scientifically robust management / corrective actions to confirm survey methodology is fit for purpose and to ensure management actions to be reducing threat levels to the extent that habitat is optimal for the species to occupy. Such actions (including associated monitoring) will be incorporated into an updated OMP which will be submitted to DCCEEW for approval. If Koala or Greater Glider have not once been detected following Year 5 surveys, BMA will provide DCCEEW with an alternative offset option for approval."

It is EnvA's view that this response is unacceptable. Based on the information provided, the proposed offset does not demonstrate a reasonable likelihood of delivering measurable conservation gains for either the koala or greater glider within a timeframe commensurate with the habitat losses associated with the Project. The likely delay in securing an alternative offset area and developing a revised OMP is contrary to the protection and management of threatened species and must be rejected.

Alternatively, no approval should be granted until the Proponent can demonstrate that the proposed offset site supports, or is highly likely to support, viable populations of the koala and greater glider and is capable of delivering measurable conservation outcomes consistent with the EPBC Act Environmental Offsets Policy.

Inflated habitat quality improvement

Submitter 2 noted that the habitat quality improvements for koala and greater glider are inflated by start quality and 'rounding' practice in order to use the offsets assessment guide. The submitter noted that Table D in Appendix D¹² shows that habitat quality for:

- Koala will improve from 7.34/10 to 7.63/10, where the 0.29/10 improvement is rounded to one integer improvement, and a 30% discount on offset; and
- Greater Glider will improve from 7.17/10 to 7.54/10, therefore 0.42/10 improvement is also rounded to one integer improvement, and a 60% discount on offset

Submitter 2 notes that "Each of the above enables the proponent to 'round down' the start quality to 7/10, and 'round up' future quality to 8/10, providing BMA a perverse, anti-precautionary discount on its offset obligations."

¹⁰ [EPBC \(2012\) Environmental Offsets Policy](#)

¹¹ [BMA \(2026\) Appendix F: Offset management plan](#)

¹² [BMA \(June 2024\) Appendix D. 7N5N2N Power line alignment MNES Ecological Report. Prepared by Ausecology](#)

EnvA considers that this is unacceptable and discounted offsets are permitted through a rounding calculation. This loophole promotes the benefit of the offset but does not adequately compensate for the clearing of habitat of threatened species and communities. EnvA further considers that the methodology substantially understates the true offset requirement for the koala and results in a level of discounting that is inconsistent with the precautionary intent of the EPBC Act Environmental Offsets Policy.

For the reasons outlined above, EnvA remains concerned that significant issues raised through public consultation have not been adequately addressed in the final preliminary documentation. We respectfully request that you direct the Department to independently review the matters raised by submitters and ensure that any decision on the Project is based on a comprehensive assessment of cumulative impacts, threatened species impacts, and the effectiveness and suitability of the proposed offset arrangements.

We appreciate your consideration of this correspondence and would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Rowston', is positioned below the text 'Yours sincerely,'.

Dr Coral Rowston

Director

Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland