

Jackie McKeay
Acting Deputy Director-General
Environmental Services and Regulation

By email: DETSIESRDDG.Corro@detsi.qld.gov.au

1 June 2026

Dear Ms McKeay,

Coal mine water releases: Management, reporting, monitoring, impacts and transparency

Thank you for your response dated 22 May 2026 regarding our concerns about coal mine water releases in the Fitzroy Basin sent to Environment Minister Andrew Powell on 27 April 2026.

While we appreciate the information provided, we are disappointed that the response does not substantively address most of the concerns and recommendations raised in our correspondence.

Our letter did not question whether a mine water release framework exists, nor did it dispute that improvements were made following the 2012–2016 pilot project. Rather, we raised concerns that the framework continues to rely on a pilot program undertaken more than a decade ago under significantly different environmental and industry conditions.

In particular, our correspondence requested consideration of:

- whether the cumulative impacts of simultaneous releases from more than 50 coal mines operating in the Fitzroy Basin have been assessed under current conditions;
- whether the regulatory framework remains appropriate given the increased frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall events;
- whether the growing use of Temporary Emissions Licences indicates deficiencies in mine water management infrastructure at some operations;
- improvements to public transparency and access to mine water release information; public accessibility of 28-day reports and Receiving Environment Monitoring Program (REMP) reports; and
- whether enforcement mechanisms are sufficient to deter repeated non-compliance.

Your response does not address these matters.

Cumulative impacts

The department states that the current framework remains effective and notes that authorised mine water releases accounted for approximately 0.6% of total Fitzroy River flow past Rockhampton during the 2025–26 wet season.

However, this statistic does not address the issue raised in our letter.



Our concern relates to cumulative impacts within individual sub-catchments and waterways where releases occur, particularly during periods when multiple mines discharge simultaneously. The proportion of total flow measured at Rockhampton does not provide an assessment of localised impacts on water quality, aquatic ecosystems, or environmental values within receiving streams and rivers upstream.

Accordingly, we request clarification as to whether the department has undertaken any contemporary cumulative impact assessment of coal mine water releases across the Fitzroy Basin since completion of the 2012–2016 pilot project. If such assessments have been undertaken, we request that they be made publicly available.

Reliance on historical pilot project outcomes

The response notes that the pilot program demonstrated that controlled releases could be managed without adverse impacts.

However, the pilot involved a small number of mines operating under conditions that differ substantially from those that exist today. Since that time, the number of coal mines in the catchment has increased significantly, many operations have expanded, and extreme rainfall events have become more frequent.

Our request was for the department to consider whether reliance on a decade-old pilot remains scientifically justified given these changed circumstances. The response does not address this question.

Transparency and public reporting

The response notes that mine water release information is available on the department's website and that hourly water quality data can be accessed through the Water Monitoring Information Portal.

This does not address the specific concern raised in our letter.

Our concern is that the public release website generally displays static commencement data for the duration of a release event, despite operators being required to collect additional monitoring information throughout the release. As a result, the public cannot readily determine actual release volumes, changing salinity levels, or compliance with trigger investigation levels during the course of a Mine Affected Water release.

Similarly, requiring members of the public to individually request 28-day reports through the Public Register does not provide timely or transparent access to information.

We therefore reiterate our request that:

- daily release monitoring information be made publicly available during release events;
 - 28-day reports be proactively published on the Public Register;
 - REMP reports be made publicly accessible through the relevant Environmental Authority pages;
- and
- consideration be given to improving public access to data submitted through WaTERS.

Temporary Emissions Licences

The response notes that ten Temporary Emissions Licences were issued during the 2025–26 wet season and that these were necessary to manage safety risks.

However, our concern was not whether individual TELs were lawful or justified. Rather, we questioned whether repeated reliance on TELs may indicate deficiencies in water management planning or storage infrastructure at some sites.

The response does not address this broader policy concern.

Compliance and enforcement

Our letter raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of enforcement responses where operators repeatedly fail to comply with water management obligations.

The response states that the department takes action in accordance with its Enforcement Guidelines but does not address whether current penalties provide an adequate deterrent or whether repeated extensions and compliance notices are achieving improved environmental outcomes.

Request for further information

Given the significance of the Fitzroy Basin as the largest catchment flowing to the Great Barrier Reef, we respectfully request responses to the following questions:

1. Has the department undertaken any cumulative impact assessment of coal mine water releases in the Fitzroy Basin since completion of the 2012–2016 pilot project?
2. Has the department reviewed whether the current framework remains appropriate in light of the increased number and scale of coal mining operations and the increased frequency of extreme rainfall events?
3. Does the department intend to improve public accessibility of mine water release monitoring data, 28-day reports, or REMP reports?
4. Has the department evaluated whether repeated reliance on Temporary Emissions Licences indicates a need for improved mine water management infrastructure at some operations?
5. Does the department intend to review the Model Mining Conditions Guideline, which continues to reference potential amendments arising from the pilot project?

We would appreciate a response to these questions and look forward to continuing constructive engagement on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Coral Rowston
Director
Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland Inc.