

Hon Murray Watt MP
Minister for the Environment and Water
c/- Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Submitted via the EPBC portal

29 June 2026

Dear Minister,

RE: Submission on Referral – Washpool Coal Project (EPBC 2026/10539)

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission in response to the referral of the Washpool Coal Project (**the Project**) proposed by Washpool Co (Qld) Pty Ltd, a subsidiary of Magnetic South Pty Ltd (**the Proponent**) for assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) (**EPBC Act**).

Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland

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 believes that opening new and expanding coal and gas projects:

- is contrary to meeting Australia's emission targets and Queensland's emission targets,
- is likely to result in irreparable damage to our local landscape and result in stranded assets,
- will put our local community at further risk of extreme weather such as increasing the intensity and frequency of storms, floods, droughts and bushfires,
- will damage our significant coastal resources including our beaches and the Great Barrier Reef through storm surge and increased coral bleaching events,
- will further degrade wildlife habitats of state and national significance through both habitat loss and climate change, and
- rarely take into consideration the views of Traditional Owners and local communities who are concerned about protecting their land from fossil fuel development.

ENVA'S SUBMISSION

1. EnvA submits that the referral demonstrates that the proposed action is likely to have unacceptable impacts on Matters of National Environmental Significance which cannot presently be avoided, mitigated or offset, and a large greenfield coal project is contrary to legislated emission reduction targets, international obligations and implementation of the Safeguard Mechanism.
2. In the alternative, EnvA strongly recommends it be declared a controlled action due to significant residual impacts on:
 - Listed threatened species and communities (ss 18 and 18A),



- Listed migratory species (ss 20 and 20A),
- Water resources (ss 24D and 24E),
- World Heritage (ss 12 and 15A),
- National Heritage (ss 15B and 15C)
- Commonwealth marine areas (ss 23 and 24A), and
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (ss 24B and 24C).

The Proponent concurs that the project may impact on all these Matters of National Environmental Significance (**MNES**; Section 4.1 of the referral application¹).

3. We further recommend that if this Project is accepted for assessment, that it be assessed through a bilateral environmental impact statement (**EIS**) process. The Proponent has indicated that they will apply to prepare a voluntary EIS under the Queensland *Environmental Protection Act 1994 (EP Act)* and is likely to be supportive of a bilateral assessment process. An EIS assessment would allow:
 - Public input on the terms of reference,
 - Rigorous assessment of species surveys, habitat fragmentation, cumulative impacts, water resources, and climate risks, and
 - Transparency in the evaluation of offsets, mitigation, and alternatives.

Further detail to support our recommendation is provided below.

The proposed action

The Project is a proposed greenfield open cut coal mine pit and associated infrastructure, primarily mining metallurgical coal. Approximately 5.5 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa) of run of mine (**ROM**) and an estimated 2.5 Mtpa of metallurgical coal for export to international markets. The Proponent estimates that coal extraction will occur for 20 years which may result in a total of 110 million tonnes of ROM coal.

The Project proposes the construction and operation of an open cut coal mine within mineral development licence MDL 3015 and MDL 3016, located on cattle grazing land approximately 12.5 km northwest of the township of Blackwater in central Queensland. The proposed project area is approximately 8,700ha, with a disturbance footprint of approximately 7,500ha.

The infrastructure required for the Project includes a ROM coal pad, ROM coal haul road and site access road (via IDM) with a bridge crossing of the Isaac River, go line and crib area, levees along the Isaac River and Cherwell Creek, diversion of Conrock Gully, mine affected water dam, sediment dams, water transfer pipelines and power line.

GROUND'S FOR SUBMISSION

Justification

The Proponent considers that establishing a full-scale mine would support the ongoing demand for metallurgical coal products throughout international markets and would contribute to the state of Queensland's employment rate and annual revenue through exports and royalties.

This economic justification does not adequately consider the environmental and social costs of the Project as required under a genuine triple bottom line assessment. The clearing and disturbance of over 8,000ha, the impacts on the environment, the increased greenhouse gas emissions fuelling climate change impacts and the subsequent impacts on human rights.

¹ [Washpool Co \(2026\) Application No 3477. Washpool Coal Project \(EPBC 2026/10539\)](#)

The recently approved Washpool Coking Coal Bulk Sample Project aimed to establish the viability of a coal project and to identify potential markets into which the coal may be sold to inform the economic viability of the project. It is clear that the economic viability has not yet been ascertained, with the vague statement “At this stage, the pit is designed for the extraction of an estimated 5.5 Mtpa of ROM coal, with approximately 2.5 Mtpa of product coal, subject to further coal quality and product specification testing.”

The Proponent considers that there will be ongoing demand for metallurgical coal in the international market, but less than half of the coal to be extracted is expected to meet metallurgical coal quality. The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) has concluded that Australia does not need to approve more coal mines to increase coal production, the pipeline of coal mine approvals contrasts with global market outlooks and that approving new and expanding coal mines increases rehabilitation uncertainty and risks to taxpayers.²

Scientists have also questioned whether coal mine expansion benefits local communities in the long run and determined that coal mining is a less desirable option when the social and environmental costs are factored into the justification.³ This is reinforced by the many small Central Queensland coal companies falling into administration and larger companies placing mining operations into care and maintenance.⁴

EnvA considers that this application is premature while sampling and testing is still in progress, and the justification is not based on an appropriate assessment as an ecologically sustainable development.⁵

Collectively, these matters demonstrate that the Project has not established a compelling public interest justification sufficient to outweigh the significant environmental impacts.

Suitability of operator

Magnetic South notes that Washpool Co (QLD) Pty Ltd has no current or historical records of proceedings against them under Commonwealth, State or Territory law for the protection of the environment or the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources

It is further claimed that Washpool Co (QLD) Pty Ltd has adhered to its regulatory responsibilities and is committed to operating in an environmentally and socially responsible manner during the design, approvals, construction, operation and closure of the Project.

This is misleading and inaccurate as Magnetic South has been the subject of at least three investigations in respect to their environmental management at the Gemini Coal Mine – tree clearing without authority, exploration outside of approved areas and inappropriate erosion and sediment control. Of these investigations, the Proponent was issued a Direction Notice for undertaking exploration activities outside of its approval.⁶

These compliance issues are directly relevant to the Minister's consideration of the credibility of the Proponent's commitments regarding environmental management and mitigation. A history of non-compliance necessarily reduces confidence that future environmental impacts can be effectively managed.

² [IEEFA \(11 February 2025\) Australia's coal production limits far exceed actual output, so why approve new mine developments?](#)

³ [De Valck, J et al. \(2021\) Does coal mining benefit local communities in the long run? A sustainability perspective on regional Queensland, Australia. Science Direct](#)

⁴ [EnvA \(2026\) Central Queensland coal company Vitrinite enters administration as sector instability deepens](#)

⁵ [DCCEW \(2021\) Criteria for determining ESD relevance](#)

⁶ [Queensland Government \(12 January 2023\) Direction Notice issued to Magnetic South Pty Ltd](#)

Threatened species and communities and migratory species

The Project will or is likely to have a significant impact on numerous threatened species and communities listed under the EPBC Act.

In addition to a desktop survey, the Proponent's consultant conducted surveys in Autumn and Spring 2025. From these surveys, the Proponent has identified numerous threatened species, communities and migratory species within the study area and/or within the project footprint area. Some of these species and communities will be impacted by the Project include:

Threatened ecological communities

- Brigalow (*Acacia harpophylla* dominant and co-dominant) (Endangered)

Threatened species

- White throated snapping turtle (*Elseya albagula*: critically endangered)
- Latham's snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*: vulnerable)
- Squatter pigeon (*Geophaps scripta scripta*: vulnerable)
- Sharp-tailed sandpiper habitat (*Calidris acuminata*: vulnerable)
- White-throated needletail (*Hirundapus caudacutus*: vulnerable)
- Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*: endangered)
- Greater glider habitat (*Petauroides volans*: endangered)
- Ornamental snake habitat (*Denisonia maculata*: vulnerable)
- Short-beaked echidna habitat (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*: Special Least Concern)
- Coolabah Bertya (*Bertya opposens*: Vulnerable)
- Ooline (*Cadellia pentastylis*: Vulnerable)

Migratory species

- Fork-tailed swift (*Apus pacificus*)
- Oriental Cuckoo (*Cuculus optatus*)

There is no detailed mapping or descriptions of the distribution of threatened species and communities, or habitat for migratory species provided in the Terrestrial Ecology Report.⁷ The report is substantially the same as that provided for the Washpool Bulk Sampling referral (EPBC 2025/10402) and hence our submission on the Bulk Sampling Project remain relevant.⁸

The lack of detailed information, combined with a lack of any information on the mine rehabilitation and offsets for such a large coal mine is disturbing and inappropriate for such a large-scale mining development which would result in significant environmental impacts.

EnvA further notes that the list of species and communities that may be impacted are regularly identified in coal mine applications in the Bowen Basin. The Project cannot be considered in isolation. The Bowen Basin has experienced decades of incremental habitat clearing, groundwater extraction and river modification through successive coal mine approvals. Each individual project has contributed to cumulative impacts that now threaten ecological function across the region. Approval of another 7,500 ha disturbance footprint would further erode the resilience of already fragmented ecosystems.

EnvA is of the strongest view that this Project must be refused on the basis of the unacceptable impacts to threatened species and communities from:

- the direct impacts due to the loss of habitat,

⁷ [Aarc \(2026\) Attachment 2. Summary of terrestrial ecology surveys undertaken to date in relation to Washpool Coal Project and EPBC Act listed entities](#)

⁸ [EnvA \(2026\) Submission on Referral – Washpool Coking Coal Bulk Sample Project \(EPBC 2025/10402\)](#)

- the cumulative impacts of the continuing approval of new and expanding coal mines in the Bowen Basin in Central Queensland, and
- the increasing impacts of extreme weather events on these species and communities.

Importantly, the referral acknowledges the presence of multiple EPBC-listed threatened species and communities within or adjacent to the disturbance footprint. This alone demonstrates that significant impacts are reasonably foreseeable and require rigorous assessment.

There is no detail on the proposed rehabilitation of the disturbed land and no information on how the impacts would be offset.

If the project cannot be refused until further assessments of the impacts on threatened species and communities, and migratory species is completed, we strongly recommend that Listed threatened species and communities (ss 18 and 18A), and Listed migratory species (ss 20 and 20A) are included controlling provisions.

Water Resources

The Project is located within the Mackenzie River catchment of the greater Fitzroy River basin – the largest Great Barrier Reef catchment. The Project MDLs are located just upstream of Bedford Weir on the Mackenzie River. Bedford Weir is part of the Nogoa Mackenzie Water Supply Scheme.

The Project area is drained by a number of minor tributaries of Burngrove Creek, a tributary of the Mackenzie River. Burngrove Creek joins an anabranch of the Mackenzie River to the west of the Project area. The minor tributaries drain west towards the Burngrove Creek floodplain.

The Surface Water report⁹ provided with the application only provides an overview of the existing surface water environment in the vicinity of the Project and details the surface water monitoring program that has been implemented since mid-2025. The collected surface water data will provide baseline information for a future Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to assess the impacts of the Project on local and regional surface water resources, including proposed mitigation and management measures.

This level of information presents no useful information to assess the potential significant impacts to surface water. EnvA reiterates our comments on the Bulk Sample Pit submission, that potential impacts include:

- reduced surface runoff to receiving waters due to the capture of runoff within the Project water management system,
- adverse impacts on flooding in local tributaries and receiving waters, and
- adverse water quality impacts due to the risk of surface water discharges from the water management system to receiving waters.

The Ground Water report¹⁰ notes that:

- There is insufficient data available to define the alluvium extent and thickness north of AQ111 and south of the Mackenzie River. The potential for hydraulic connection between the Mackenzie River and the underlying aquifer is unknown,
- The extent and thickness of the Quaternary alluvium is unknown between the Coal Mine Lagoon and the planned pit location. There is limited or insufficient groundwater level data to determine the water table,

⁹ [WRM \(2026\) Attachment 4. Washpool Mine Project - EPBC referral – Surface Water](#)

¹⁰ [Hydrogeologist \(2026\). Attachment 5. Washpool Coal Project - Groundwater Network Review](#)

- The conceptual model near the Mackenzie River and Coal Mine Lagoon requires further refinement to determine the relationship between the shallow groundwater system and the surface water features,
- Further groundwater monitoring data including water levels, water quality, permeability and yields for the aquifers systems is required to refine the conceptual models and to support any Project approvals and associated impact assessment, and
- Further groundwater level and quality measurements are needed over the wet or dry season cycle to assess trends and potential interaction with surface water features.

The referral effectively acknowledges that the investigations required to understand groundwater and surface water interactions have not yet been completed. Without that information, neither the Minister nor the public can properly assess the significance of impacts or the effectiveness of proposed mitigation.

EnvA notes that the Washpool Coal Project was previously subject to an EIS when it was proposed by Aquila Resources (EPBC 2009/5240)¹¹. The controlling provisions were listed as threatened species and water resources.

While that proposal was withdrawn from assessment under the EPBC Act before a final decision was made, it is clear from documents prepared during this assessment that the impacts on Mackenzie River, other water resources and listed threatened species would be significant. The Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development (IESC)¹² expressed serious concerns about the level of information provided and provided advice on matters which needed to be addressed including:

- Impacts on baseflow in the Mackenzie River and interaction between groundwater and surface water in Mackenzie River, Burngrove Creek and Coal Mine Lagoon,
- Cumulative impacts on groundwater and surface water resources, including from Curragh Coal Mine and Jellinbah Coal mine to the east, Ensham Coal Mine to the west and Blackwater Coal Mine to the south,
- The suitability of Burngrove Creek for releases of mine affected water due to the flow regime in the creek and presence of licenced discharge points upstream (Curragh West Coal Mine),
- Alteration of flow and flooding regimes in Coal Mine Lagoon anabranch, which has water quality that is unsuitable for release to the Mackenzie River/Bedford Weir, and longer term impacts for the geomorphology of Coal Mine Lagoon,
- Impacts on water quality in Bedford Weir which is used for agriculture, stock watering, industrial use and potable water supply, and
- Impacts of releases of sediment and changes in flow regime on the endangered Fitzroy river turtle.

EnvA considers that there is likely to be a significant impact on water resources which have not been adequately addressed in the current Project application.

Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions

A greenhouse gas emission report¹³ was prepared at DCCEE's request for further information.

¹¹ [Washpool Coal Mine Project \(EPBC 2009/5240\)](#)

¹² [IESC \(2014\) Advice to decision maker on coal mining project - Washpool Mine Project \(EPBC 2009/5240\)](#)

¹³ [Katestone Environmental Australia \(2026\). Attachment 6. Washpool Coal Mine greenhouse gas assessment and decarbonisation plan](#)

The estimated total GHG emissions are estimated at 144 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents (Mt CO₂-e) comprised of:

- 4.91 Mt CO₂-e of Scope 1 emissions;
- 0.139 Mt CO₂-e of Scope 2 emissions;
- 139 Mt CO₂-e of Scope 3 emissions.

The Proponent acknowledges that the Project will trigger NGER reporting requirements and the Safeguard Mechanism, but no detail is provided about managing emissions against a declining facility baseline.

The Proponent's emissions management strategy is to minimise GHG emissions through efficient operation, best-practice design and the progressive adoption of abatement technologies where they are technically and economically practicable. "At this early approval stage, the proposed management measures remain preliminary and will be reassessed and refined as the Project progresses through subsequent approval stages."

There is insufficient information required to assess if the project can meet the requirements of the Safeguard Mechanism and the proposed mitigation is heavily reliant on offsets rather than meaningful emission reduction.

EnvA submits that the Minister cannot reasonably approve this Project without being satisfied that it is compatible with the Safeguard Mechanism and Australia's legislated emissions reduction targets. If the Project cannot demonstrate compatibility with the Safeguard Mechanism, it will undermine Australia meeting commitments such as:

- The Paris Agreement¹⁴
- Legislated emission reduction targets¹⁵ and interim targets¹⁶,
- Belem Declaration on the Transition away from fossil fuels¹⁷, and the
- Global Methane Pledge.¹⁸

Heavy reliance on ACCUs does not constitute genuine abatement and shifts mitigation burdens elsewhere rather than reducing gross emissions.

The GHG emissions are roughly equivalent to the emissions from an average coal-fired power station operating continuously for over 20 years. They will significantly contribute to increased global temperatures and result in adverse impacts to numerous MNES. Australia, and of particular concern to EnvA, Central Queensland (where this mine is proposed), is already experiencing climate change impacts that include an increased frequency and severity of coral bleaching, storms, heat waves and wildfires, and an increase in the number of endangered species and ecosystems. As global warming increases to 1.5°C and above, these impacts will increase in severity.

EnvA considers that this is a clearly unacceptable Project at a time when the world is needing and wanting to transition to a clean energy future. There are sufficient coal resources already approved to supply the domestic and international demand. Approving another coal mine to operate for 20 years is irresponsible and contrary to meeting legislated emission reduction targets and the legally binding international treaty on climate change.

¹⁴ [The Paris Agreement](#)

¹⁵ [Climate Change Act 2022](#)

¹⁶ [Australian Government \(2025\) Setting our 2035 target and path to net zero](#)

¹⁷ [Australia joins Belém Declaration to transition from fossil fuels](#)

¹⁸ [Global Methane Pledge](#)

World Heritage, National Heritage and the Great Barrier Reef

The Proponent notes that the Project is located within the Fitzroy Basin catchment - the largest catchment draining to the Great Barrier Reef (**Reef**) World Heritage Area. The Reef is also a listed National Heritage Area and is part of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The Mackenzie River is one of the five main tributaries and consequently, the Project may directly impact the Reef from potential contamination of watercourses that discharge into the catchment, although considers that there would not be a significant impact to the Reef.

The Proponent considers that sediment runoff contaminating watercourses will be subject to an erosion and sediment control plan and include control measures focussed on preventing or minimising soil erosion and trapping or retaining sediment in catchments draining to non-mine water management systems. However, no erosion and sediment control plan is provided, and the Proponent has a demonstrated history of poor erosion and sediment control.

For example, Lock the Gate reported poor watercourse management to the Queensland Government in late 2025, including evidence of the erosion and sediment that were being implemented. Lock the Gate shared some photographic evidence at the time (depicted below), which in the event of a moderate to heavy rainfall event, would not in any way prevent sediment or contaminated water entering the Reef catchment.



Given the information provided, the Proponent's acknowledgement that there may be impacts to the Reef, the lack of information provided in the application that the impacts can be mitigated or managed, and the significant contributions to greenhouse gas emissions, that controlling provisions must also include:

- (a) World Heritage (ss 12 and 15A),
- (b) National Heritage (ss 15B and 15C),
- (c) Commonwealth marine areas (ss 23 and 24A), and
- (d) Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (ss 24B and 24C).

Accordingly, the Project presents both direct risks (through catchment impacts) and indirect risks (through climate change) to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The referral documentation presents a proposal that would clear thousands of hectares of habitat, generate approximately 144 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, create significant uncertainty regarding impacts to water resources, and adversely affect multiple Matters of National Environmental Significance. The information provided is insufficient to demonstrate that these impacts can be avoided, mitigated or offset.

EnvA therefore respectfully submits that the Project should be refused. If the Minister is not considering refusing the Project, it should be declared a controlled action and assessed through a bilateral Environmental Impact Statement with full public consultation so that its environmental consequences can be rigorously examined before any decision is made.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make comments on the referral of the Washpool Coal Project.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Coral Rowston

Director

Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland