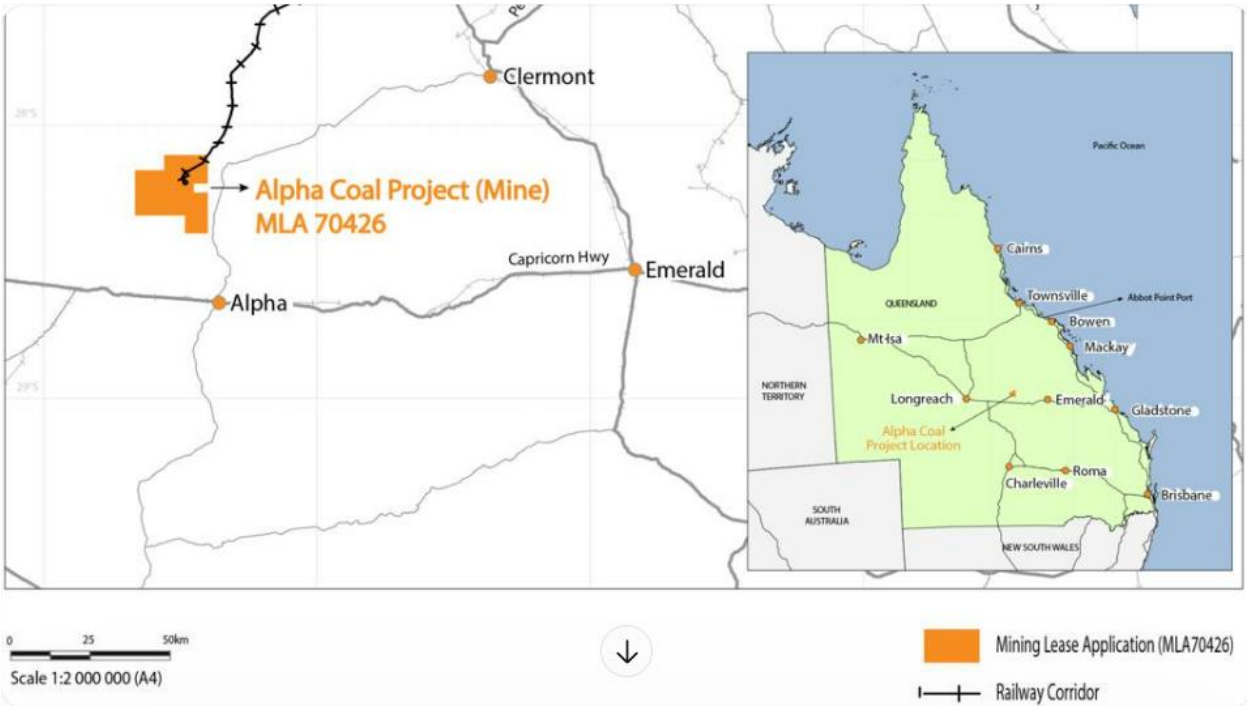
History of the Alpha Coal Mine, Queensland: From Proposal to Liquidation (2008–2026)

Historical overview | Galilee Basin, Central Queensland | Updated 1 November 2026



1. Introduction

The Alpha Coal Project was one of the major proposed coal developments in Queensland's Galilee Basin. It was intended to become a large-scale, open-cut thermal coal mine, supported by a new railway and expanded coal-export infrastructure at Abbot Point.

The project was initially developed by Hancock Prospecting, associated with mining magnate Gina Rinehart. In 2011, India's GVK Group acquired a majority interest in the project in a transaction valued at approximately US$1.26 billion.

Despite obtaining important Queensland and Commonwealth environmental approvals, the project never progressed to construction or commercial coal production.

After almost 18 years of development, regulatory processes, legal challenges and prolonged delays, Hancock Coal Pty Ltd, the company associated with the Alpha mine, entered liquidation in October 2026.

The history is particularly significant because it illustrates the difference between obtaining environmental approvals and securing the remaining regulatory, financial and commercial requirements needed to establish a major mining operation.

It also raises questions about the long-term status of mining tenements, environmental approvals and other obligations when a proposed mine is abandoned and its project company enters liquidation.

2. The original proposal (2008–2010)

2008 – Project announced

Hancock Prospecting began advancing the Alpha Coal Project in 2008.

The project was located approximately:

- 50 kilometres north-north-west of Alpha township;
- 130 kilometres south-west of Clermont; and
- within the Galilee Basin in Central Queensland.

On 24 October 2008, the Queensland Government declared the Alpha Coal Project a significant project under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971.

The initial proposal involved developing a large open-cut thermal coal mine, together with the infrastructure required to transport coal to the coast for export.

2009 – Environmental assessment begins

In January 2009, the Commonwealth Government determined that the project was a controlled action under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

This meant that the project required assessment and approval under Commonwealth environmental legislation, in addition to Queensland's regulatory requirements.

The Queensland Coordinator-General issued the terms of reference for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in June 2009.

The company also lodged Mining Lease Application (MLA) 70426 on 18 December 2009. The proposed mining lease covered approximately 32,423 hectares.

2010 – Environmental Impact Statement

Hancock submitted its EIS in 2010, with public consultation occurring between 5 November and 20 December 2010.

The original project included:

Component	Proposed development
Mine	Large-scale open-cut thermal coal mine
Production	Up to 30 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa)
Mine life	Approximately 30 years
Mining areas	Four open-cut pits
Processing	On-site coal preparation plant
Railway	Approximately 495 kilometres
Export destination	Abbot Point, north of Bowen

The proposed railway was particularly significant. It was intended to connect the Galilee Basin to Abbot Point, providing the transport infrastructure necessary to export coal to international markets, particularly in Asia.

The original project was expected to commence construction in late 2011, with the first coal shipments anticipated in early 2014. Those dates were subsequently missed by many years.

3. GVK acquires a majority interest (2011)

On 16 September 2011, India's GVK Group announced an agreement with Hancock Prospecting and associated companies to acquire interests in Hancock's Australian coal and infrastructure projects.

The transaction was valued at approximately US$1.26 billion.

Under the agreement:

- GVK acquired up to 79% of the Alpha Coal and Alpha West coal projects.
- Hancock retained the remaining 21%.
- GVK acquired 100% of the Kevin's Corner coal project.
- GVK also acquired interests in the associated railway and port infrastructure projects.

The Alpha project was subsequently developed through a joint venture involving GVK Coal Developers and Hancock Coal.

The acquisition was presented as a major investment in Australia's emerging Galilee Basin coal industry.

GVK envisaged combining Alpha, Alpha West and Kevin's Corner into a major coal-mining and export operation.

Financing difficulties emerge

Despite the substantial acquisition, significant challenges remained.

The overall development required billions of dollars in capital investment, including:

- construction of the mine;
- the 495-kilometre railway;
- port infrastructure at Abbot Point;
- water and electricity infrastructure; and
- associated mine-processing facilities.

In June 2013, the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (**IEEFA**) published its report Stranded: A Financial Analysis of GVK's Proposed Alpha Coal Project in Australia's Galilee Basin.

The report questioned the project's economic viability, pointing to the scale of the required investment, falling international thermal coal prices, infrastructure costs and the difficulty of securing finance.

It also raised concerns about GVK's lack of experience in developing and operating large-scale coal mines outside India.

These were the authors' financial assessments rather than a formal determination that the project was unviable. Nevertheless, the financing challenge became an important feature of the project's subsequent history.

4. Environmental approvals (2012)

May 2012 – Queensland approval

In May 2012, the Queensland Coordinator-General completed the EIS assessment and issued the Coordinator-General's report.

The project received Queensland Government approval, subject to conditions intended to manage environmental and social impacts.

August 2012 – Commonwealth approval

On 23 August 2012, the Commonwealth Government granted environmental approval under the EPBC Act.

The approval included 19 conditions addressing environmental impacts, including:

- protection of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area;
- management of coal dust;
- protection of threatened species;
- protection of the black-throated finch and squatter pigeon;
- management of water quality;
- rehabilitation;
- vegetation protection; and
- environmental offsets.

The approval required, among other things, management arrangements for the Caley Valley Wetlands and measures to minimise coal dust impacts associated with transporting coal to Abbot Point.

These approvals represented significant progress for the proponents. However, they did not mean that all the necessary Queensland mining approvals had been secured.

In particular, the mining lease remained unresolved.

5. Land Court objections and environmental challenges (2013–2014)

This period proved particularly important in determining whether the Alpha mine could proceed.

The proposed grant of the mining lease and environmental authority attracted objections from environmental organisations and affected landholders.

2013 – Land Court proceedings

In September 2013, objections to the proposed mine were heard by the Queensland Land Court.

The principal objectors included:

- Mackay Conservation Group;
- Coast and Country Association of Queensland;
- individual environmental objectors; and
- landholders concerned about potential groundwater impacts on their properties.

The proceedings considered a range of environmental and landholder issues, including:

- groundwater extraction and impacts on neighbouring properties;
- impacts on aquifers and groundwater-dependent ecosystems;
- potential effects on permanent springs;
- cumulative impacts of mining in the Galilee Basin;
- biodiversity impacts; and
- greenhouse gas emissions associated with the mine.

The hearing ran for 13 days between 16 September and 2 October 2013, with closing submissions subsequently presented.

8 April 2014 – Land Court decision

In Hancock Coal Pty Ltd v Kelly & Ors and Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (No. 4) [2014] QLC 12, the Land Court delivered its recommendations.

The decision was a significant setback for the proponents.

The Court recommended that the mining lease and environmental authority applications either be refused or be approved only after additional requirements had been addressed.

A major concern was the potential impact of groundwater extraction on neighbouring landholders and other groundwater users.

Although the Court considered that the proponents had undertaken substantial groundwater investigations, it found that the impacts on other groundwater users had not been adequately investigated or addressed.

The Court recommended additional safeguards, including:

- appropriate groundwater monitoring;
- obtaining the necessary water licences;
- making good agreements with affected landholders; and
- additional conditions to protect groundwater resources.

The decision was not a final refusal of the project. The Land Court made recommendations to the Queensland Government, which retained responsibility for the ultimate regulatory decisions.

Nevertheless, the recommendations created additional hurdles for the proponents.

6. Environmental Authority granted, but legal challenges continue (2014–2017)

October 2014 – Environmental Authority granted

On 9 October 2014, the Queensland Government granted an Environmental Authority (EA) for the Alpha Coal Mine.

This was an important regulatory milestone.

However, the mining lease had still not been granted, meaning the mine could not proceed to construction and operation.

The distinction is important: obtaining an EA did not constitute final approval to establish and operate the mine.

2015 – Supreme Court challenge

Coast and Country Association of Queensland challenged aspects of the Queensland Government's decisions concerning the mine.

The association argued, among other things, that the Government had failed to properly consider the Land Court's recommendations and the project's greenhouse gas emissions.

On 4 September 2015, the Queensland Supreme Court dismissed the judicial review proceedings in Coast and Country Association of Queensland Inc v Smith [2015] QSC 260.

The Court considered that the Land Court's recommendations were not binding decisions and rejected the legal challenge to the Ministers' actions.

The decision did not mean that the outstanding mining lease had been granted.

2016 – Court of Appeal

Coast and Country appealed the Supreme Court decision.

On 30 September 2016, the Queensland Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal in Coast and Country Association of Queensland Inc v Smith & Ors [2016] QCA 242.

2017 – High Court application

The association subsequently sought special leave to appeal to the High Court of Australia.

On 7 April 2017, the High Court dismissed the application, finding that the matter was not a suitable vehicle for resolving the legal issues raised.

These proceedings brought the principal judicial review challenge to an end.

However, they did not resolve the outstanding mining lease application.

7. The project remains stalled (2015–2025)

Despite the environmental approvals and the resolution of the principal court challenges, the Alpha Coal Project did not progress to construction.

There were several interrelated problems:

A. The mining lease was never granted

The most important outstanding regulatory requirement was the grant of the mining lease.

MLA 70426 remained an application rather than becoming a granted mining lease.

The company's Environmental Authority was also recorded as granted but not effective, reflecting the outstanding regulatory requirements.

B. Financing and commercial viability

The project required enormous capital investment.

The mine could not operate without the associated railway and port infrastructure, which also required substantial investment.

The proposed railway was approximately 495 kilometres long and was intended to provide access to Abbot Point.

The development therefore depended on financing and coordinating several major infrastructure projects.

C. Changes in the coal market

The project was conceived during a period of strong international demand for thermal coal.

However, the economics of the project became increasingly challenging as international coal prices changed and the costs and risks associated with developing new infrastructure became more apparent.

The project also faced increasing scrutiny over the long-term prospects for new thermal coal developments as countries pursued emissions-reduction policies.

D. No construction or production

Although the project had originally anticipated first coal exports in 2014, that milestone was never achieved.

The proposed mine did not progress to commercial construction or production.

The Queensland Government's subsequent records continued to identify the mining lease as an application.

8. October 2026 – Hancock Coal enters liquidation

October 2026 – Liquidation

The final chapter in the Alpha Coal Project's history came in October 2026.

On 29 October 2026, ABC News reported that Hancock Coal Pty Ltd had entered liquidation, with liquidators appointed on 27 October.

Hancock Coal Pty Ltd was the Australian company associated with the Alpha Coal Mine.

The ABC reported that:

- the company had planned an open-cut mine approximately 50 kilometres north of Alpha;
- the mine was designed to export up to 30 million tonnes of thermal coal annually;
- the proposed mine life was approximately 30 years;
- the project had spent several years involved in legal proceedings over groundwater concerns; and
- despite obtaining approvals, the project had not progressed in recent years.

The ownership structure was also clarified.

GVK held the majority interest, while Hancock Energy retained a minority interest.

Hancock Prospecting indicated that GVK had controlled and managed the venture for more than a decade.

Five Australian companies enter liquidation

The liquidation was not limited to the Alpha mine company.

A disclosure by GVK Power & Infrastructure on 29 October 2026 identified five Australian subsidiaries of GVK Coal Developers (Singapore) as having entered liquidation:

1. Hancock Alpha West Pty Ltd.

2. Hancock Coal Pty Ltd.
3. Hancock Galilee Pty Ltd.
4. Hancock Kevin's Corner Pty Ltd.
5. Hancock Coal Infrastructure Pty Ltd.

These companies were associated with the wider Galilee Basin mining and infrastructure development strategy.

The five-company liquidation is significant because it affects not only the Alpha mine but also the associated coal projects and infrastructure arrangements.

The liquidation of Hancock Coal Infrastructure is particularly relevant to the proposed railway and port infrastructure.

The reported liquidation of these companies marks the collapse of the Australian corporate structure established to advance GVK's Galilee Basin projects.

It is important, however, to distinguish the liquidation of these companies from the legal status of individual mining tenements and environmental approvals. Those matters require separate consideration.

9. What is the current position of the Alpha Coal Project?

As at 1 November 2026, the available records indicate the following:

Issue	**Position**
Mine construction	Never commenced
Commercial coal production	Never commenced
Mining Lease Application 70426	Remains recorded as an application
Environmental Authority	Granted, but recorded as not effective
Original project proponent	Hancock Prospecting
Majority project interest	GVK Group
Australian mine company	Hancock Coal Pty Ltd
Company status	In liquidation
Proposed railway	Never developed as originally planned
Proposed export infrastructure	Never delivered as originally planned

The mining tenure information is particularly important. The available mining tenure records continue to identify Hancock Coal Pty Ltd as the holder of MLA 70426, covering approximately 32,423 hectares.

The liquidation does not, by itself, establish that the mining lease application or Environmental Authority has automatically been cancelled. Their legal status, and any consequences arising from the insolvency, need to be established through the relevant Queensland Government registers and decisions.

10. Key dates – summary chronology

The following table brings together the major events in the project's history.

Date	Event
2008	Hancock Prospecting advances the Alpha Coal Project.
October 2008	Queensland Government declares the project a significant project.
January 2009	Commonwealth declares the project a controlled action under the EPBC Act.
December 2009	Mining Lease Application 70426 lodged.
2010	Environmental Impact Statement submitted and public consultation undertaken.
September 2011	GVK announces acquisition of up to 79% of Alpha and Alpha West, and 100% of Kevin's Corner, for approximately US$1.26 billion.
May 2012	Queensland Coordinator-General issues project assessment report.
August 2012	Commonwealth environmental approval granted under the EPBC Act.
June 2013	IEEFA publishes its report questioning the project's financial viability.
September–October 2013	Queensland Land Court hears objections to the proposed mine.
8 April 2014	Land Court recommends refusal or further conditions addressing groundwater and other concerns.
9 October 2014	Queensland Government grants the Environmental Authority.
4 September 2015	Supreme Court dismisses Coast and Country's judicial review challenge.
September 2016	Queensland Court of Appeal dismisses the appeal.
April 2017	High Court dismisses the application for special leave.
2017–2025	Project remains undeveloped; no commercial production commences.
27 October 2026	Liquidators appointed to Hancock Coal Pty Ltd.
29 October 2026	GVK disclosure confirms liquidation proceedings involving five Australian subsidiaries.

Issues arising from the liquidation – matters warranting further investigation

From an environmental advocacy and mine rehabilitation perspective, there are several important questions arising from the Alpha Coal Project's collapse.

1. What happens to the mining lease application and Environmental Authority?

- Will MLA 70426 be withdrawn or otherwise cancelled?
- Will the Environmental Authority be surrendered, cancelled or remain on the register?
- Does the Queensland Government need to take formal action to resolve the outstanding applications?
- Are there any continuing environmental obligations associated with the project?

2. Are there outstanding rehabilitation or environmental liabilities?

Although the mine never commenced operation, there have been:

- exploration and drilling activities;
- disturbance associated with site investigations;
- environmental monitoring obligations;
- rehabilitation requirements relating to exploration activities; and
- outstanding commitments under approval conditions or other agreements.

It would be useful to establish whether all disturbed areas have been rehabilitated and whether any outstanding environmental obligations remain.

3. What happens to financial assurance?

It would be useful to establish whether any financial assurance was provided in relation to the Alpha project and, if so:

- the amount held;
- the purpose for which it was provided;
- whether it remains held by the Queensland Government; and
- whether any amount is available to address outstanding rehabilitation or environmental liabilities.

4. What happens to the mining tenements?

The liquidation raises questions about the future of the 32,423-hectare mining lease application and the associated exploration and mineral development interests.

Will the tenements be relinquished, transferred, remain in the liquidation process or be dealt with in another way?

5. What are the implications for the other Galilee Basin projects?

The liquidation of the five Australian subsidiaries is also relevant to the future of:

- Alpha West;
- Kevin's Corner;
- the proposed Galilee Basin railway; and
- associated port infrastructure.

These projects were part of a broader integrated development strategy, rather than independent developments.