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Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
Email to: aec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

Re: Submission to Committee on Environmental Protection (Underground Water Management) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016

The Australian Marine Conservation Society thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to your inquiry into the Environmental Protection (Underground Water Management) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 (**Bill**).

The Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) is an independent charity comprised of a committed group of professional scientists, educators and advocates who work on behalf of the community to protect Australia's coasts, oceans and marine life. The associated effects of groundwater impacts on our groundwater resources and all environmental features and community members who are dependent on them from resource companies are some of the least understood impacts we have on our environment. We support the notion that if there is an unclear understanding of the environmental impacts of an action, that action should not be allowed to be undertaken.

It is therefore essential that a precautionary approach is an incorporated element in the assessment of the proposed 'associated water licence'. Existing water licence provisions which apply to mining companies currently require the principles of ecologically sustainable development ('ESD'), including the precautionary principle, to be applied to assessment of groundwater impacts. All other water licence applicants will still be required to be subject to the precautionary principle. Good management of our groundwater resources must always include the application of the principles of ESD to water licence assessment, including for the associated water licence.

In general, we do not support the government's intention to commence the Newman Government's statutory right to groundwater as introduced through the *Water Reform and other Legislation Amendment Act 2014*. No resource company should get free, unlimited access to groundwater when extracting coal or gas, because it's risky to the environment and unfair to other water users. A license should always be required for all mining water use – with submission and appeal rights to a Court that has final determination. This is an important check and balance on proposed impacts to our groundwater resources.

However, this Bill goes some way to addressing some of the problems introduced through the statutory right to associated water for mines, and belatedly also for the statutory right provided to the petroleum and gas industry.

Our submissions are:

- 1) **AMCS supports the improvements proposed in the Bill by the current State government to the groundwater impact assessment for projects at the environmental authority stage**

Clean groundwater resources and high quality water run-off are essential to natural systems. Operational groundwater resources are also essential to all farmers, communities and businesses in Queensland. These improvements will also go towards improving assessment of petroleum and gas resource projects under the environmental authority process.

- 2) **AMCS support the current government's proposal that mines obtain an 'associated water licence' if they have not gone through the improved groundwater impact assessment introduced by the Bill.**

This would mean the public submission and appeal rights would continue to apply to large, risky coal mines like -Adani Carmichael and Hancock Alpha coal mines – that pose serious potential groundwater impacts that might affect natural areas and landholders who depend on groundwater. Licensing should be required in relation to all mining and gas projects, not just older proposals.

- 3) **However, AMCS strongly recommends that the Bill is amended so that the 'associated water license' is assessed against the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD principles), as necessary for every other water license assessment.**

Our groundwater resources are precious.

The effects of impacts to our groundwater basins are often uncertain and must be assessed against these ESD principles to reduce the environmental risks associated with undertaking an action.

Yours sincerely

Shannon Hurley

Great Barrier Reef Campaigner

Australian Marine Conservation Society