



Speech By  
**Hon. Leanne Enoch**


**MEMBER FOR ALGESTER**

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**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Adani Carmichael Mine**

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algeester—ALP) (Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts) (2.00 pm): I rise to make a ministerial statement. When it comes to resources projects in this state, our government has always been clear: proponents must demonstrate that their projects stack up financially and environmentally. This is an approach that has seen more than \$20 billion worth of resource investment in this state since the Palaszczuk government came to office.

The Coordinator-General, a statutory independent decision-maker, first gave approval for the Adani Carmichael mine in 2014, assigning more than 190 conditions to that project in order for it to proceed. Since that time, as is the usual practice and in keeping with the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Department of Environment and Science, as the regulator, has been working alongside the company to assess and progress its plans against the environmental conditions that are a requirement of their approvals. As the Minister for Environment, I have been consistent in my statements that the regulator would undertake its assessments and make its decisions free from political interference as is prescribed in the Environmental Protection Act, and the government has stood by that commitment.

Today, the regulator has informed Adani that, following many years of work, the groundwater dependent ecosystem management plan has met the environmental conditions required by its environmental authority and has been approved. In granting this approval, the regulator has met the time frame for its decision, which was put in place by the Coordinator-General on 24 May. Let me be clear: today's decision as per the Environmental Protection Act was not and could not be made by me or anyone else in the cabinet. It has been made by the regulator and is backed by expert advice.

The groundwater dependent ecosystem management plan is a critically important document that puts in place safeguards for the protection of groundwater in the project area, including the Doongmabulla Springs complex. Assessment of the groundwater plan has been subject to a thorough scientific process. At times, the robustness of the process has attracted criticism from those in the media and the community who would have liked a quicker decision and it has been derided by the LNP in Queensland, which appeared to be keen to see all environmental processes abandoned. But the people of Queensland have a right to expect that the government takes a responsible approach to environmental protection, upholds the law and supports decisions based on the best available science.

Our state has some of the most rigorous environmental protections in the country and we do not apologise for that. This year, there have been two remaining management plans that are required for stage 2 undergoing assessment for the Carmichael mine. The black-throated finch management plan, as well as this groundwater plan, have both undergone thorough assessment by independent experts. In cases where assessment is required for matters of particular significance, I support the decision taken by the regulator to seek independent expert advice.

The location of the proposed Carmichael mine is home to Australia's largest and most significant known population of the southern black-throated finch, which is an endangered species as listed under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and under Queensland legislation. I am advised by the regulator that, following comprehensive feedback, largely as a result of that independent advice, Adani agreed to substantial improvements to its finch management plan and it was on that basis that the plan was approved about two weeks ago.

Similarly, the groundwater dependent ecosystem management plan has received its approval on the basis of significant amendments and commitments to continue to undertake important monitoring work over the next two years and throughout the life of the mine. As I mentioned earlier, one of the most highly publicised sections of the groundwater plan relates to the Doongmabulla Springs complex, an important wetland located in the vicinity of the project area. Let me be very clear for the benefit of the House and the community that the regulator's assessment of the impact of the project on the springs has been comprehensive and based on the best available science. The regulator received specific additional advice from CSIRO and Geoscience Australia on this matter.

I am advised that, based on this expert scientific advice and legal opinion, the regulator is satisfied that the groundwater dependent ecosystem management plan sufficiently establishes the main source aquifer of the springs. To the extent that other lesser sources are plausible but not proven, the regulator has sought and received commitments from Adani to undertake further scientific work as recommended by CSIRO and Geoscience Australia in the next two years to identify any potential contribution from other aquifers.

Both the Commonwealth Department of Environment and the Queensland department sought expert advice from CSIRO and Geoscience Australia in their assessments of the groundwater plan. Following the approval by the former federal minister for environment, on the eve of the federal election, might I add, and after threats from members of the LNP to have her sacked, it was important that the Queensland regulator discuss the plan again with CSIRO and Geoscience Australia to clarify their advice and request any additional changes. Just in the last 24 hours we have seen what happens when appropriate processes are not followed in the granting of approvals for resource projects.

The federal government's decision to concede the case brought against it regarding Adani's north Galilee water scheme demonstrates how critically important it is for proper processes to be followed. It will be interesting to see how the federal government justifies its approval of a previous version of the GDMP given the considerable enhancements that have been required in order for it to reach a standard for approval by the Queensland regulator. As a result of that extra engagement with CSIRO and Geoscience Australia, Adani was requested to make further changes to the groundwater plan to strengthen it and ensure environmental protections.

Yesterday, I am advised that Adani submitted a new version of the groundwater dependent ecosystem management plan—version 12a. At the regulator's request, a range of additional commitments have been made, some of which I will outline here for the benefit of the House. To further improve the understanding of source aquifers of the springs complex, Adani is required to undertake detailed hydrogeochemical analysis of water sampled from groundwater and different spring groups; examine core samples from new bores to attain a better understanding of hydraulic properties and provide more detailed geological mapping; incorporate airborne electromagnetic modelling undertaken by Geoscience Australia to improve hydrogeological understanding of the area; and install a deeper bore to below the Rewan Formation in the vicinity of the Doongmabulla Springs complex. This will help to address the concerns raised by scientists from Flinders University that Permian aquifers may be a source to the springs complex.

As further protection measures, Adani has also committed to the following: using a Dunda Beds bore in the vicinity of the Carmichael River as an early warning drawdown trigger for groundwater drawdown monitoring to the Carmichael River. At the second model rerun, Adani will review the latest hydrochemistry and seismic information. If this review determines that additional seismic studies are required to better understand the source aquifers of the Doongmabulla Springs complex, Adani will complete these surveys and include the data in revised modelling. Underground mining will not commence until these actions are completed and only if predicted impacts are consistent with approved impacts. Other measures have also been agreed if the conceptual model or impacts differ from that of the approved project.

The development of this groundwater plan has been a rigorous process. The Coordinator-General first required the groundwater plan to be produced in 2014. It was two years before a version was first provided to the Department of Environment and Science in November 2016. In total, Adani has submitted updated versions of its groundwater plan to the regulator 12 times since 2016. The

department has provided feedback on each submitted version in order to ensure that what has been approved for the company today meets the standard expected of a management plan and provides appropriate protections.

I acknowledge the hard work of the staff in the Department of Environment and Science who work every day to ensure management plans like this are produced to the highest standard. Going forward, the role of the regulator continues to be incredibly important as it ensures compliance with the approved management plan. Unfortunately, to date Adani has not always engaged with the department in the same constructive way that other major resources companies have done. I hope that this is not an indication of how the company will approach its future obligations. As with all projects, the regulator will focus strongly on compliance with the approved plan and the company has an obligation to Queenslanders to ensure it acts in accordance with its approvals.

The regulator's decision to approve the groundwater management plan today comes after a comprehensive scientific assessment; Queenslanders expect nothing less from their environment department. The obligation is now on Adani to abide by its approval conditions as it goes about its work.