

# Australia approves huge India-backed mine

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File photo taken in February 2011 shows workers using heavy machinery to sift through coal at the Adani Group's thermal power plant in Mundra, India

Australia has given the go-ahead to a massive coal mine in Queensland state which Environment Minister Greg Hunt said Monday could ultimately provide electricity for up to 100 million Indians.

Hunt said approval for Indian firm Adani's Aus\$16.5 billion (US\$15.5 billion) Carmichael [coal](#) mine and rail project, which has been criticised by anti-coal groups, was subject to 36 conditions.

"The absolute strictest of conditions have been imposed to ensure the protection of the environment, with a specific focus on the protection of groundwater," he said in a statement.

State officials say the project, which could potentially be the largest coal mine in Australia and one of the largest in the world, will play a major role in opening up Queensland's resource-rich Galilee Basin.

The development proposes open-cut and underground coal mining some 160 kilometres (100 miles) northwest of Clermont in central Queensland, as well as a 189-kilometre rail link. It is forecast to produce 60 million tonnes of thermal coal a year for export.

The project is expected to contribute some Aus\$2.97 billion to the Queensland economy each year for the next 60 years, and generate thousands of jobs.

"It is estimated the project will provide electricity for up to 100 million people in India," Hunt added.



Activists during a protest in Sydney in support of Australia's Great Barrier Reef on February 1, 2013

The minister said his conditions complemented those imposed by the Queensland government, and would ensure the developers met the highest environmental standards and that all impacts were "avoided, mitigated or offset".

The state government has established 190 conditions to protect landholders, flora, groundwater resources and air quality, as well as controls on dust and noise during construction and operation.

Hunt's conditions on Adani include that it must monitor groundwater changes and ensure a minimum of 730 megalitres of water are returned to the Great Artesian Basin every year for five years.

The developer must also contribute funding to address cumulative impacts to threatened species and communities.

The Australian Conservation Foundation said the approval was "bad news for water resources, wildlife and the global effort to tackle climate change".

"Coal from the Carmichael mine will be shipped through the Great Barrier Reef, where dredging for a new coal export terminal will damage coral and harm marine life," it said.

The development would also take billions of litres of water from underground aquifers, creating problems for farmers, and destroy part of the remaining habitat of the endangered black-throated finch, it said.

"While some of the conditions imposed by the environment minister are welcome, they cannot stop this mine from being an environmental disaster," said campaigner Ruchira Talukdar.

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