

Australia approves India-backed Adani mine despite fears for reef

October 15 2015, by Glenda Kwek



Australian government approves plans to build one of the world's biggest coal mines despite conservationists' fears it threatens the Great Barrier Reef

Australia Thursday approved a controversial Indian-backed project to build one of the world's biggest coal mines despite conservationists' fears it threatens the Great Barrier Reef and vulnerable species while worsening global climate change.

The Aus\$16.5 billion (US\$12.1 billion) project in Galilee Basin in Queensland state has attracted fierce criticism from environmentalists who say the development, which requires coal to be shipped to a port on the coast, risks the World Heritage-listed reef's health and destroys local habitats.

Critics have also warned that the mine—which they said could be as large as 28,000 hectares (69,000 acres)—would contribute to global warming, while supporters argue it would create thousands of jobs and boost regional infrastructure.

Adani Enterprises has faced numerous hurdles for the open-cut and underground coal mine, possibly Australia's largest, with the approvals process so far stretching to five years.

Conservationists were Thursday also flagging possible fresh legal challenges following the decision, which came two months after the Federal Court blocked the mine largely in relation to two vulnerable reptiles—the lizard-like yakka skink and the ornamental snake.

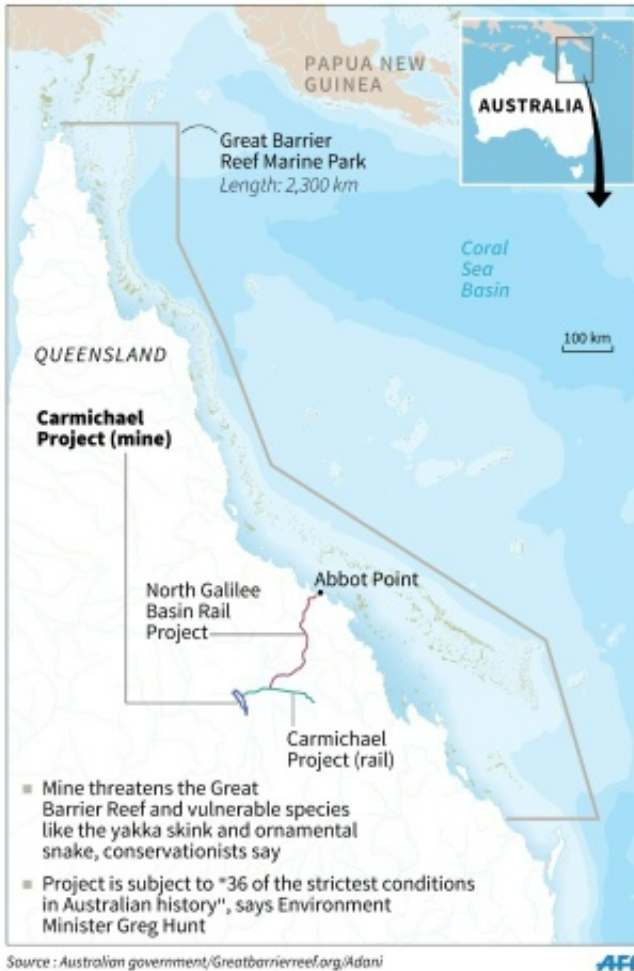
Environment Minister Greg Hunt said the project was approved subject to "36 of the strictest conditions in Australian history".

"The rigorous conditions will protect threatened species and provide long-term benefits for the environment through the development of an offset package," Hunt said in a statement.

"These measures must be approved by myself before mining can start," he added, noting that he had the power to suspend or revoke the approval and impose penalties if there was a breach of conditions.

India-backed coal mine

Australia on Thursday approved a controversial project to build one of the world's biggest coal mines



Map locating the India-backed coal mine in Australia which conservationists' say threatens the Great Barrier Reef and vulnerable species

Under the conditions, all advice from an independent scientific committee has to be implemented, 31,000 hectares of southern black throated finch habitat will be protected and improved, and groundwater at a nearby wetland will be monitored.

Some Aus\$1 million of funding over 10 years also has to be allocated to

research programmes that boost the conservation of threatened species in the Galilee Basin, about 1,200 kilometres (745 miles) northwest of Queensland's capital Brisbane.

'Disaster for climate, reef'

The Indian conglomerate, which has accused activists of exploiting legal loopholes to stall the mine, welcomed Hunt's decision and the "rigorous and painstaking conditions".

"Today's announcement of the final federal approval for the Carmichael Mine and North Galilee Basin Rail by Minister Hunt makes clear that these (conservation) concerns have been addressed, reflected in rigorous and painstaking conditions," the company said in a statement, referring to a new rail line which will transport the coal to port.

Adani added that the mine would create 10,000 jobs and generate Aus\$22 billion in taxes and royalties, although the figures have been disputed by critics, who argue that plunging coal prices were making the development financially unviable.

At the same time, British bank Standard Chartered and the Commonwealth Bank of Australia have withdrawn as financial advisers, while major European and US banks have refused to fund the project due to environmental concerns.



Plans to develop coal mines and ports to export resources have drawn protests in Australia due to fears such projects could threaten the Great Barrier Reef

Shares in Adani, which has said the mine would produce 60 million tonnes of thermal coal a year, jumped more than 12 percent in afternoon trading on the Bombay Stock Exchange following the announcement.

Despite the government's conditions, the Mackay Conservation Group—which brought the legal challenge to the Federal Court—said the approval "risks [threatened species](#), precious groundwater, the global climate and taxpayers' money".

"Minister Hunt has again failed the people of Australia by ignoring new evidence on the devastating impacts of what would be Australia's largest coal mine," the group's co-ordinator Ellen Roberts said.

Environmental campaign group Greenpeace said the mine would be a "complete disaster for the climate and the Great Barrier Reef".

"The federal government and environment minister should be in the business of protecting the reef and the climate, not giving mining companies licence to destroy them," Greenpeace's Shani Tager said.

"This project means more dredging in the Great Barrier Reef, more ships through its waters and more carbon emissions."

Local indigenous landowners, who are battling Adani in a separate case in the Federal Court, also slammed the approval and described the state and federal governments' actions as "economically and environmentally irresponsible and morally bankrupt".

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