

# Last-ditch attempt to warn of coalmine harm

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Scientists warn the Doongmabulla Springs Complex could be permanently damaged if the mine goes ahead. Credit: Coast and Country

Groundwater experts from around Australia have repeated calls for further investigations into the potential effects on heritage groundwater reserves in central Queensland if the giant Adani Carmichael coalmine gets the final regulatory go-ahead. Concerns the ancient Doongmabulla

Springs face a 'reasonable threat of extinction' from Adani's proposed Galilee Basin coalmine are raised in a new position paper, which echoes previous research by CSIRO and Geoscience Australia.

The Queensland Government is due to rule on the groundwater hurdle this week after clearing the way to another environmental concern, supporting Adani's proposed management plan for the endangered black-throated finch.

Experts from Flinders University, RMIT, Monash and Latrobe universities say their report, 'Deficiencies in the scientific assessment of the Carmichael Mine impacts to the Doongmabulla Springs' - now before the Queensland Government—highlights problems with Adani's own claims that the springs are safeguarded by "an impervious layer, restricting water from flowing between the underground aquifers".

"Adani has not properly examined the link between the mine's groundwater drawdown and impacts to the Doongmabulla Springs, which is a fundamental requirement of the Carmichael mine's approvals," says Flinders University Professor of Hydrogeology Adrian Werner, a founding member of National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training.

Instead Professor Werner, with Flinders Associate Professor Andy Love, Dr. Eddie Banks and Dr. Dylan Irvine—with Associate Professor Matthew Currell from RMIT University, Professor Ian Cartwright from Monash University and Associate Professor John Webb from Latrobe warn the springs face a "plausible threat of extinction".

"Six years of advice from experts that the science is flawed does not seem to have overcome critical shortcomings with the science that have persisted despite several iterations of Adani's environmental management plans," says Professor Werner.

"With the deadline for approval approaching, we are compelled to reiterate concerns that flaws in Adani's scientific methods, modelling results, and the proposed 'adaptive management' approach by Adani have the potential to seriously mislead decision-makers," he says pointing to the 2013 Independent Expert Scientific Committee report, Land Court case of 2014-15 and this year's CSIRO review.

Professor Werner says: "We hope that our report assists the Queensland Government by highlighting the significant risk that the Carmichael Mine will cause the Doongmabulla Springs to become extinct, and will impact other groundwater-dependent ecosystems and water users to a greater degree than has so far been suggested by Adani."

The report pinpoints four areas where Adani's investigation and environmental management strategies do "not stack up against the science":

- Adani appears likely to have significantly underestimated future impacts to the Doongmabulla Springs Complex.
- Should the Carmichael Mine cause springs within the Doongmabulla complex to cease flowing, the impact could be permanent.
- Adani's safeguard against the impacts, namely 'adaptive management', is unsuitable and unlikely to protect the springs from extinction.
- Cumulative impacts to the Springs that may result from other mining activities in the Galilee Basin have not been adequately considered.

Provided by Flinders University

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