

# Australia approves coal port expansion near Barrier Reef

22 December 2015, by Martin Parry



Australia has approved a controversial port expansion to support coal mining projects and the dredging of spoil despite conservationists' fears it threatens the Great Barrier Reef

Australia on Tuesday approved a controversial port expansion to support mining projects and the dredging of 1.1 million cubic metres (2.4 million cubic feet) of spoil despite fears it threatens the Great Barrier Reef.

The decision, creating a huge port capable of handling up to 120 million tonnes of coal per annum, comes two months after the government green-lighted an Indian-backed plan to build one of the world's biggest mines in the same area of Queensland state.

The Aus\$16.5 billion (US\$12.1 billion) Carmichael project by Adani Enterprises in the Galilee Basin, home to vast coal reserves, has attracted fierce criticism, requiring the fossil fuel to be shipped through the deepwater Abbot Point Coal Terminal which is currently at capacity.

Environmentalists have argued that any expansion at Abbot Point risked the World Heritage-listed

reef's health and would destroy local habitats.

"The Queensland state Labor government's Abbot Point Growth Gateway project has been approved in accordance with national environment law subject to 30 strict conditions," a spokeswoman for Environment Minister Greg Hunt said.

Earlier plans were for at least three million cubic metres of material to be dredged and dumped into waters around the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, but this was later abandoned after an outcry.

The approval now permits 1.1 million cubic metres to be dredged, allowing more freighters to dock at Abbot Point, near the town of Bowen, but spoil must be disposed of on existing industrial land.

"No dredge material will be placed in the World Heritage Area or the Caley Valley Wetlands," said Hunt's spokeswoman. "The port area is at least 20 kilometres (12.4 miles) from any coral reef and no coral reef will be impacted."

## The Great Barrier Reef



Factfile on the Great Barrier Reef.

The decision comes barely a week after 195 nations, including Australia, agreed in Paris to try and limit global warming to 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-industrial levels.

Hunt said he was comfortable that good-quality Australian coal would feed Indian electricity consumption.

"If they didn't have Australian participation... they would be using lower quality fuel," he told ABC radio.

"So lower quality fuel and lower efficiency (power) stations—so the net global impact of not using

Australian fuels would be for emissions to go up, not down."

### 'Illogical, irresponsible'

Adani, which has previously accused environmental activists of exploiting legal loopholes to stall its massive open-cut and underground mine which is forecast to produce 60 million tonnes of thermal coal a year for export, welcomed the decision.



Environmentalists argue that any expansion at Abbot Point risks the health of the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef and destroy local habitats

"The expansion of Abbot Point, the lifeblood of Bowen, is key to Adani's plans to deliver 10,000 direct and indirect jobs and Aus\$22 billion in taxes

and royalties to Queensland," it said in a statement.

Critics argue that plunging coal prices make the development financially unviable, while major European and US banks have refused funding due to environmental concerns.

Greenpeace said the Abbot Point go-ahead was "irresponsible for the reef, illogical and unnecessary".

"Adani hasn't got the Aus\$16 billion, no-one's lending it to them, and coal prices are tanking. Even the International Energy Agency is questioning the project," said Greenpeace reef campaigner Shani Tager.

WWF-Australia said the waters around Abbot Point were home to dugongs, sea turtles and snubfin dolphins while the dredge spoil would be dumped on land adjacent to wetlands used by migratory birds.

"It's disappointing that the minister has approved this project within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, despite the damage it will do," spokeswoman Louise Matthiesson said.

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