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WARATAH/BLIGH MINING ANNOUNCEMENT PREMATURE

Conservation and community groups in Queensland have responded with grave concerns to the just announced coal mining deal in the Galilee Basin in Central Queensland between China and mining magnate Clive Palmer, and the speed with which Premier Bligh has jumped on the bandwagon. The groups say that it would be premature to assume an automatic green light.

“The project has not yet secured mining leases”, says Mackay Conservation Group’s Patricia Julien who heads up the alliance of regional groups. “Its holdings are only coal mining exploration permits according to the Queensland Department of Mines and Energy Mining Tenure online maps. Yet reports state that the mining will begin at the end of 2010 or in 2014”. The impact assessment for Waratah’s development began only late last year, and due to the scale of their proposal it will require years of assessment for it to be at all credible.

“If the proper processes are to be followed, there is simply no way this time frame could happen” Mrs Julien says. “These processes are in place to safeguard the environmental values of the country, yet both the Government and Mr Palmer are speaking in language which suggests strongly that the Queensland Government, in its desperation to quickly improve its economic situation, will attempt to fast-track and rubber stamp the deal”.

“This would be a massive project so its environmental impact assessment should not be fast tracked. Under threat of adverse impacts are a Nature Refuge, grazing and agricultural lands, stock routes, towns and ecosystems in a region where less than 3% of the land is in protected conservation areas. We do not want to see further environmental losses in Central Queensland because of exports of more carbon pollution to China. This is a strategy which will come back to haunt us as climate change causes decline of the Reef and our tourism, grazing and agricultural industries and loss of our woodland bird and other arboreal species. Neither do we want to see the usual check the box approach to community engagement by the coal industry and the State government”.

The Global Mining Carbon Disclosure Project Report by UK-based risk management company Acclimatise which says the scientific data shows climate change is clearly occurring and that the only uncertainty now is about how severe and how quickly its impacts will be felt. “As this project and the adjacent Hancock projects plan to export 100 million tonnes of coal a year, that represents the release ~300 million tonnes of carbon pollution annually. This is equivalent respectively to 77% of energy sector and 53% of all of Australia’s 2006 greenhouse gas emissions, just from three mines. These mines will produce around 30 million tonnes per year each of export coal. By comparison most mines in the neighbouring Bowen Basin each produce between 2-9 million tonnes a year of coal.” The larger size means larger scale impacts on the environment, communities and coastal ports and marine areas. Proposed port development at Abbot Point to accommodate the mining industry is out of scale with the site.

The report also identifies mining’s heavy reliance on water supplies and that the sector has always taken inexpensive water for granted. Less water, declining water quality and

growing water demand and costs are creating challenges in the mining sector. “These are already being felt here, Mrs Julien confirms. “Water taken for mines means less or no water available for development of other industries, and pressure for more dams such as the current Connors Dam project for water for coal mining.”

“In pre-empting the process, the Premier is sending mixed messages by behaving on the one hand as though the Government’s own processes and climate change are minor considerations when it comes to mines and on the other saying people and business must take steps to reduce their carbon footprints. It is a high risk strategy to put all your eggs in the coal basket. We want sustainable proactive rather than reactive leadership and planning for Queensland.”

ATTACHED: Fact Sheet, Mackay Conservation Group

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