

THE FACTS - RESPONDING TO ADANI & THE QLD GOVT'S WATER CLAIMS

Introduction

This briefing responds to claims made by Adani and the Queensland Government in recent media reports about Adani's water use. A fully referenced fact sheet on the impacts of Adani's mine on Queensland water is [available here](#).

In short, the Adani coal mine will:

- suck out at least 270 billion litres of groundwater over the life of the mine
- put aquifers of the Great Artesian Basin at risk
- dump mine-polluted wastewater into the Carmichael River
- threaten ancient springs that provide permanent water during drought
- leave behind 6 unfilled coal pits that will drain millions of litres of groundwater every year, permanently.

Adani's groundwater water licence allows unlimited access to associated groundwater for 60 years for free.

CLAIM: Adani does not have unlimited access to water

Adani says: Adani "does not have access to unlimited water" and were only allowed to take and reuse associated water that was encountered during normal mining operations.

Facts: Adani does have unlimited access to take groundwater associated with mining operations. There are no volumetric limits placed on the groundwater take in the associated water licence¹, and Adani is not required to pay for the associated water it takes. In other states, such as NSW, there are volumetric limits placed on water licences for groundwater extraction by mining companies and companies are required to pay for the groundwater they take. Public rights to object to the Adani associated groundwater licences were removed in a 2016 midnight sitting of Parliament².

CLAIM: Adani's mining is free of risk to ancient springs

Adani says: "A thorough and transparent scientific investigation conducted as part of the Carmichael Mine's approval process showed mining could be conducted without permanent damage to the Doongmabulla Springs."

Facts: The Federal Bioregional Assessment into the impacts of mining on water resources in the Galilee Basin, conducted by the Federal Government after completion of Adani's groundwater assessment, made clear there was major uncertainty about whether Adani's mine threatens the nationally significant Doongmabulla Springs³. It recommended additional research be conducted to properly understand the impacts of the mine on the Springs. However this has not yet been undertaken.

¹ Associated Water Licence 617264 granted to Adani Mining Pty Ltd by DNRM on 29/3/2017.

² Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016

³ Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation. 2016. Lake Eyre Basin Springs Assessment Project: Hydrogeology, Cultural History and Biological Values of Springs in the Barcaldine, Springvale and Flinders River supergroups, Galilee Basin and Tertiary Springs of western Queensland. Pp 179-184.

CLAIM: Adani's water use is modest

Adani says: *"Independent scientific studies estimate a maximum impact of 730 megalitres per year at the peak of mining in indirect impacts to Great Artesian Basin aquifers. Putting this into perspective, the Carmichael Mine will use less water from the Great Artesian Basin each year than a 450ha lower Burdekin cane farm."*

Facts: Adani itself estimates that the overall associated groundwater extraction will average 4.7 billion litres of water per year, which equates to 270 billion litres over the life of the mine⁴. In the project's environmental impact statement Adani stated that the mine would extract up to 9.5 billion litres of water a year from groundwater sources.

That is a far greater volume than the amount of water used each year on a lower Burdekin cane farm.

In relation to take from the Great Artesian Basin itself, there is major uncertainty over Adani's estimates. Most importantly, the Independent Expert Scientific Committee flagged that there may be greater impacts to the Basin if subsidence due to longwall mining were to cause fractures in geological formations⁵.

Adani says: *"This will allow us to take 10,800 megalitres of flood water per year and only when the Carmichael River is in flood to ensure downstream users such as farmers have their water requirements prioritised."*

Facts: The flood water taken by Adani will be from the Suttor River, north of the mine. Any additional take of surface water results in less water for the environment. Any additional take of surface water results in less water for the environment. The environmental impacts of the take of Adani's surface water from the Suttor River is poorly understood because it was not assessed in the Adani Environmental Impact Statement.

Adani was given special access to previously unallocated water from the Suttor River held in the strategic reserve⁶. There was no public consultation on the grant of water to Adani from the strategic reserve, and no opportunity for public objections.

CLAIM: Adani is subject to "strict environmental conditions"

Adani says: *"Groundwater is safely and appropriately managed at many mines throughout Australia using the checks and balances that will be in place at the Carmichael Mine."*

Facts: Many Australian mines have had greater impacts on water resources than predicted, but monitoring is generally inadequate and the public rarely has access to the data to assess such impacts. Furthermore, governments are generally not prepared to step in to stop further damage once a mine is underway. For example, water monitoring data shows that bore levels at a farm adjoining the Kestrel and Gregory Crinum coal mines in Central Queensland dropped five times more than predicted by mining companies.⁷

Adani says: *The Carmichael Coal project undertook detailed environmental impact assessment processes over five years, open to public and government scrutiny and consultation. Experts in their*

⁴ Adani 2016. Supporting Document for Application for Mine Dewatering under the *Water Act 2000*: Carmichael Coal Mine. P11

⁵ Independent Expert Scientific Committee [Advice on the Carmichael Coal Mine](#)

⁶ Water Licence 617268 issued to Adani Infrastructure Pty Ltd by DNRM on the 29/3/2017

⁷ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2013-08-07/nrn-bore-water-drop/4870924>

technical fields undertook detailed studies, many of which were subsequently reviewed by third party experts. After careful consideration by relevant State and Federal Government agencies, the Carmichael Project was approved with the strictest environmental conditions ever imposed on a mining project in Australia. We have received 112 approvals, all subject to conditions governing environmental and social aspects of mine, port and rail construction and operations.

Facts: Adani has failed to respond to numerous criticisms made by the Federal Independent Expert Scientific Committee about their water assessments, and failed to address many of the additional risks to the Springs and the Great Artesian Basin identified by the Committee. Adani has also failed to conduct new research as recommended by the Bioregional Assessment⁸.

Both the State and federal environmental approvals that govern water impacts for the Carmichael mine are layered with conditions. These conditions are founded on 'Adaptive Management', that is, approval is given based on the condition that further scientific work is done to clarify the known gaps in the Adani EIS reports. These conditions are testament to the numerous criticisms of Adani's research, and the doubts over the company's ability to safeguard our water.

CLAIM: Landholders are protected if their groundwater is damaged

QLD Government says: *Adani has to "make good on agreements in place with landholders whose existing groundwater entitlements might be affected."*

Facts: 'Make good' agreements force landholders into difficult negotiations with mining companies to try to obtain access to another source of water to replace what they will lose. Landholders are placed at a huge disadvantage, made to negotiate in relation to highly technical issues and all whilst maintaining the family business.

There are real risks that 'make good' agreements will be worthless where multiple mining companies operate in an area, if mining companies go bankrupt, or after mining companies pack up and leave. Landholders are left with long-term impacts on groundwater. Ultimately, a damaged aquifer can never be 'made good'.

⁸ Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation. 2016. Lake Eyre Basin Springs Assessment Project: Hydrogeology, Cultural History and Biological Values of Springs in the Barcaldine, Springvale and Flinders River supergroups, Galilee Basin and Tertiary Springs of western Queensland. Pp 179-184.