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MEDIA RELEASE

12 September 2014

State strips rights to challenge decisions

Queenslanders' rights to object to virtually all large coal mines and to uranium mines have been stripped away by the State government, according to North Queensland Conservation Council Coordinator Wendy Tubman.

'Under new legislation, most mining projects will be exempt from legal challenge, and the Coordinator-General can exempt other projects from public scrutiny in the courts', Ms Tubman said.

'We are not just talking about environmental groups here. Farmers near or within mining leases, neighbours, local communities or organised groups and Local Councils will no longer be able to challenge the environmental authority for coordinated mining proposals in the Land Court', she said.

'This is a major erosion of public rights and will have profound impacts on Queensland's environment, agriculture and communities.

'The Queensland Resources Council has long argued to the government that resource development has been held up by vexatious claims in the Court. However, the Land Court has confirmed that there is no evidence to suggest that the courts' processes were being used in this way in order to delay mine developments. The Department of the Environment and Heritage Protection has also confirmed that there was little evidence to support such claims.

'In parliamentary debate and during the public hearings into the amendments, the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, Andrew Cripps, repeatedly confirmed his and the state government's commitment to upholding the rights of Queenslanders and the maintenance of long-standing objection rights to large scale mining proposals in the Land Court.

'But, in an amendment introduced by Minister Cripps at four minutes to midnight last Tuesday, before the third and final reading of the Bill, almost all those rights were stripped away.

'Under the amended legislation, the Coordinator-General has huge powers to impose conditions and thereby cut out community objections on environmental grounds, but he also has a massive conflict of interest' said Ms Tubman.

'According to the website of the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, the Coordinator General's work is principally focused on facilitating and encouraging private-sector infrastructure projects.

'Under the new system, the only people with any control over resource exploitation will be those in government – and the current government has already announced that it is "in the coal business". This is very scary.

'What we are seeing is an insidious silencing of the public for the sake of large, foreign-owned mining companies, the impacts of which are destroying our environment, food production potential and way of life. People need to be aware of the direction in which this state is being driven.'

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