



114 Boundary Street
Railway Estate, Townsville
Qld, 4810
PO Box 364, Townsville
Ph: 61 07 47716226
office@nqcc.org.au
www.nqcc.org.au

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MQRA Project Team
Business and Stakeholder Solutions
Department of Natural Resources and Mines
E: mqra@dnrm.qld.gov.au
thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au

Dear Team Leader

Re: Mining lease notification and objection initiative discussion paper

I make this submission on behalf of North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) in relation to the above-mentioned discussion paper.

NQCC is the regional conservation council for north Queensland operating out of Townsville. As the voice for the environment in the region (covering the area from Bowen to Cardwell and from the Reef to the Northern Territory border) we are closely following and active in monitoring the development of the mining industry, especially that occurring in and proposed for the Galilee Basin, to ensure that it does not involve unacceptable environmental damage.

We state at the outset our strong opposition to the proposals contained in the paper, seeing them as a means of silencing valid community objection to unacceptable environmental, social and economic impacts. We represent and act for our members and the broader community in ensuring that development is compliant with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

With good reason, we firmly contend that a strong and healthy economy and a happy and secure community are both dependent upon a resilient and diverse environment. Development that damages our environment damages our society, our economy and our future.

On behalf of our members and the many dedicated, honest and concerned individuals in the community, we take particular offence at Minister Cripps' media release that includes the comments:

"The proposed reforms will allow us to hear from those who are directly impacted by the development rather than extreme green groups in Melbourne or California whose life goal is to create a road block for economic development.

"These individuals or groups have little or no interest in our state and submit vexatious objections to tie up economically beneficial projects."

It is a sad day for our 'democratic' system when we see an elected representative stoop to slander members of the public who use legitimate means in order to protect our environment and lifestyle. It must be a similarly chilling day for those working within the public service.

NQCC's objection to the paper is founded on the following concerns.

1. The restriction of rights to object to matters of broad significance to a small cohort strikes at the very roots of the democratic system. Removal of such rights is a form of state-sanctioned apartheid and unbecoming to Australia as a mature, ethics-based nation.
2. At a time when international and national agencies are recognising the need to assess and consider cumulative impacts, the proposals contained in this paper move Queensland in the opposite direction. The impact of the proposals would be to limit consideration of impacts to a very restricted field. There would be no realistic ability for the cumulative, interactive and synergistic impacts of a mining lease to be assessed or considered. As a result, any assessment of the impact of a mining lease would be inaccurate.
3. The power of mining conglomerates is disproportional to the power of individual landholders and to local councils. It is unrealistic to expect landholders to find the time, skills and money required to legally challenge the proposals of international mining interests. The same can be said for local councils, already dealing with a raft of new responsibilities associated with a changing climate and increased delegation from the state.
4. There is little beyond rhetoric and questionable data to support the underlying rationale for the proposals included in this paper. There is little to no evidence that there are unnecessary delays in the processing of applications for mine development. This was evident in the report of the Productivity Commission into Major Projects. [NQCC's submission on this matter](#) attests to and demonstrates that fact. Similarly, as previously shown by The Australia Institute's report '[Mining the Truth](#)', the beneficial impact of the mining industry to Queensland is highly questionable.
5. The removal of the public notification process contravenes the notion of government transparency and accountability. It further transgresses one of the fundamental tenets of the free market system – that of 'perfect information'. In effect, the state-entrenched ignorance that would result from the proposals included in this paper, would limit the power of the market to operate effectively.
6. The concept of restricting objection right to environmental authorities (as different from mining leases) further distorts the market, and further empowers mining companies over the people, increasing the inequality in Queensland.
7. There already exists legal power for a Court to dismiss any legal challenges that it considers vexatious. The fact that, to date, there have been less than a handful of cases thrown out for this reason directly refutes the allegation that community challenges are made without good reason.

8. There is international acceptance of the pending demise of the coal industry. See, for example, this [recent ABC interview](#) with University of Oxford's Ben Caldecott and this recent article in the [Australian Financial Review](#). To prop-up by way of subsidies and other market distortions such as those contained in this paper, this declining, climate-change-advancing industry at the expense of sustainable farming, the people and the environment can in no way be seen as a role of a government responsible to the people. To ignore the very real possibility of the state being left with stranded assets as well as degraded land, damaged bio-systems and destroyed communities would be an act of perverse vandalism.

On behalf of NQCC and many highly concerned people in the region, who fear and oppose this proposed disenfranchisement, I ask you not to adopt the proposals outline in this paper but to uphold the democratic process and allow any person or incorporated group to object to all mining leases and environmental authorities as and when they deem it appropriate.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Tubman', written in a cursive style.

Wendy Tubman
Coordinator