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Submission to Inquiry on the Galilee Basin (Coal Prohibition) Bill 2018

I am writing this submission on behalf of Stop Adani Sydney, an affiliate of the national Stop Adani Alliance. We are running a campaign to raise awareness about the negative impacts of the proposed Carmichael coalmine on the Galilee Basin, as well as society more broadly, and pressure stakeholders to withdraw support for the mine. I am an expert in environmental management, with a Bachelor of Environmental Systems from the University of Sydney, and have worked on conservation projects for several years.

Stop Adani Sydney supports the Galilee Basin (Coal Prohibition) Bill introduced by Senator Larissa Waters for the following reasons:

1. The potential environmental impact of the mine is of national significance and as such requires Commonwealth intervention
2. The majority of Australians do not support the construction of the Carmichael coalmine or further coalmining. As elected representatives of the Australian people, the government must listen to its constituents and pass legislation accordingly and in their interests.
3. If the Carmichael coalmine is to go ahead, it would set a dangerous precedent that would undermine Indigenous land rights claims going forward.

Firstly, the Carmichael coalmine will have a significant ecological and hydrological impact on the Great Artesian Basin (GAB), the largest groundwater resource in Australia. The GAB covers an area of 1,700,000 km², underlying approximately 22% of the country including Queensland, the Northern Territory, New South Wales and South Australia. Key industries, such as agriculture and tourism, rely on groundwater from the GAB, as well 120 towns and urban centres. The GAB also supports a variety of unique ecosystems, many of which are endemic.¹

In light of the social and environmental significance of the GAB, the government should carefully consider the impact of mining projects which propose to tap into this vital resource. A recent study by Currell et al (2017), exposes inadequacies and flaws in the environmental

¹ Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (2016). *Economic output of groundwater dependent sectors in the Great Artesian Basin*, Retrieved from: <http://www.agriculture.gov.au/water/national/great-artesian-basin/economic-output-groundwater-dependent-sectors-great-artesian-basin>

assessment carried out by Adani Group of the potential impact of the mine on aquifers connected to the GAB.² The following problems were identified:

1. The assumed model for the Doongmabulla Springs could be incorrect. An alternative model (proposed by Webb (2015)) indicates that the springs could be fed by a much deeper water source, which would mean that the mine would have significantly greater impacts on the GAB than the proponent's initial estimate.³
2. If this alternative model was adopted (and the available data suggests that it is appropriate) the mine would have a disastrous impact on spring water flow, essentially stopping flows to important wetland ecosystems, home to rare and endemic plant species.
3. Critical scientific data required to resolve these issues was lacking at the time of approval. Although the Adani Group could have conducted further research to clarify these uncertainties, they instead relied on there being no data available to disprove their assumptions.

We point out that protecting certain environmental resources is a Commonwealth responsibility and therefore this Bill is appropriate for the federal parliament to consider. Since the GAB is the largest groundwater resource in Australia, underlying several states and territories, it follows that its management falls within Commonwealth jurisdiction. The precedent for this was set by the management of the Murray Darling Basin, another significant water resource, by the Commonwealth, in conjunction with the relevant states and territories.

In addition, the Australian government has international obligations regarding emissions reduction as a signatory of the Paris Climate Agreement. The 2018 Emissions Gap Report released by the UN reveals that Australia is not on track to meet its emissions reduction targets of 26-28% by 2030.⁴ In 2015, the Climate Council released a report indicating that in order for Australia to play its role in limiting warming to less than 2 degrees, 90% of its coal reserves will need to stay in the ground.⁵ As such, the Australian Government has a responsibility to refuse coalmining projects such as the Carmichael coalmine in line with international agreements Australia has signed on to.

Secondly, as elected representatives, the Federal Government has a duty to listen to its constituents and act in their best interest. We argue that the Government has failed to do this. A ReachTELL poll of 3312 people, released on 25 January 2018, found that 65.1% of respondents strongly opposed the Carmichael coalmine.⁶ The results also showed 73.5% support for stopping the expansion of coalmining and accelerating the construction of

² Currell, M. J., Werner, A. D., McGrath, C., Webb, J. A., & Berkman, M. (2017). Problems with the application of hydrogeological science to regulation of Australian mining projects: Carmichael Mine and Doongmabulla Springs. *Journal of Hydrology*, 548, 674-682.

³ Webb, J.(2015). Adani Mining Pty Ltd vs. Land Services of Coast and Country Inc & Ors, Expert report on groundwater impacts. 6th February, 73pp. Retrieved from: <http://envlaw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/carmichael9.pdf>

⁴ UNEP (2018). The Emissions Gap Report 2018. United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi

⁵ The Climate Council of Australia (2015). *Unburnable carbon: why we need to leave fossil fuels in the ground*. Retrieved from: <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/unburnable-carbon-why-we-need-to-leave-fossil-fuels-in-the-ground/>

⁶ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/big-surge-in-opposition-to-adani-new-polling-reveals-20180131-p4yz4o.html>

renewables. One of the main arguments presented by the QLD and Federal Government for the construction of the mine is the employment opportunities it will generate. There is substantial evidence that investment in renewables will generate more employment opportunities and offset the job losses from the fossil fuel sector.⁷

Lastly, and following on from this, the Government has a responsibility to listen to traditional land owners. The Galilee Basin contains culturally significant sites. The Wangan and Jagalingou people are challenging the ILUA agreement the Adani Group is using to bypass native title laws and mine on culturally sensitive land. The W&J representatives are accusing the Adani Group of creating a sham agreement based on economic coercion. There are serious implications for overriding native title law, which put Indigenous land rights claims at risk in the future. The Native Title Act 1993 requires the government to recognise and protect native title. We believe that the construction of the Carmichael coalmine would constitute a breach of Commonwealth responsibility to protect Indigenous land rights.

In summary, Stop Adani Sydney argues that given the environmental and cultural impact of the Carmichael mine we support this Bill and urge parliament to pass this legislation to protect the Galilee Basin.

Signed

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⁷ The Climate Council of Australia. (2016). *Renewable Energy Jobs: Future Growth in Australia*. Retrieved from: <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/uploads/9bbeec4336c0f87f7e04205516b3cfa7.pdf>