



MEDIA RELEASE

The Hon Peter Garrett MP

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

PG /136

5 September 2008

MINISTER SAYS NO TO SHOALWATER BAY RAIL & PORT

Environment Minister Peter Garrett has acted to preserve the unique biodiversity values at Shoalwater Bay north of Rockhampton in Queensland, rejecting a proposal by Waratah Coal Inc. to establish a rail line and coal port in the Shoalwater Bay Training Area.

The Minister has found the proposal to be “clearly unacceptable” under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

“This proposal would have clearly unacceptable impacts on the internationally recognised Shoalwater and Corio Bay Ramsar wetlands and the high wilderness value of Shoalwater which is acknowledged in its Commonwealth Heritage listing,” Mr Garrett said.

“The impacts of the rail line and port facility are simply too great to effectively mitigate, and would destroy the ecological integrity of the area. They are impacts that cannot be reduced with offsets or managed through approval conditions.

“Destruction of fragile wilderness areas cannot be reversed. As Minister for the Environment I am required by law to protect the environment from actions on Commonwealth land.

“I have carefully considered the advice from my department on the broader proposal and agree that the plan to run a rail line through Shoalwater and build a coal port in the location proposed is clearly unacceptable.

“I wish to make it abundantly clear that I have rejected this proposal because of the impacts the route of the rail line and the location of the coal port would have on the environment.”

The Minister said that in lodging its referral proposal, Waratah Coal was advised that it should consider the environmental risks associated with locating the proposed port within the Shoalwater Bay Military Training Area given the recommendations of the 1994 Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry into Shoalwater Bay.

“This decision does not prevent an alternative proposal being lodged that does not have unacceptable impacts on Ramsar and heritage values, for consideration under the Act. I would encourage Waratah Coal to consider alternative sites for the port,” Mr Garrett said.

Waratah Coal Inc referred the proposal to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on the 30th July this year. The referral process determines whether a proposal needs to be assessed under the EPBC Act and if so the level of assessment required or, as in this case, whether the action is clearly unacceptable.

This is the third time a proposal has been deemed clearly unacceptable under section 74B of the EPBC Act.

Media contact: Ben Pratt, 0419 968 734