

Morrison government approves next step towards Adani coal mine

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

The Morrison government has ticked off on the groundwater management plan for the proposed Adani coal mine, an important but not a final step for the central Queensland project receiving the go-ahead.

The decision, taken by Environment Minister Melissa Price, comes after intense pressure from Queensland Liberal National Party members, including a threat by senator James McGrath to publicly call for Price's resignation if she failed to treat the Adani project fairly.

Read more: [*View from The Hill: It's the internal agitators who are bugging Scott Morrison on Adani*](#)

But the Adani decision will not help Liberals fighting seats in the south, with strong anti-Adani campaigns in some key electorates.

Price said in a statement on Tuesday: "CSIRO and Geoscience Australia have independently assessed the groundwater management plans for the Carmichael Coal Mine and Rail Infrastructure project", and both had confirmed the revised plans met strict scientific requirements.

"Following this independent assessment and the Department of Environment and Energy's recommendation for approval, I have accepted the scientific advice and therefore approved the groundwater management plans" for the mine and rail infrastructure under Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

She said the decision did not amount to final approval for the project.

Morrison government approves next step towards Adani coal mine

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

It needed further approvals from the Queensland government before constructing could commence. So far only 16 of 25 environmental plans have been finalised or approved by the Commonwealth and Queensland with nine more to be finalised.

The project “must meet further stringent conditions of approval from the Commonwealth before it can begin producing coal,” Price said.

It had “been subject to the most rigorous approval process of any mining project in Australia,” she said.

Resources Minister Matt Canavan, a Queenslander who has been agitating for progress on the mine, said: “I welcome these further approvals. Now we need the state Labor government to stop dragging their heels and get on with the job of creating these jobs.”

Bill Shorten - who, like the government, has been caught between the conflicting imperatives of campaigning in central Queensland and in southern Australia on this issue - said the Queensland government now had to go through its processes.

Labor would “adhere to the law” and be “guided by the science,” he said. “We are not interested in sovereign risk.”

Referring to the pressure within the Coalition, Shorten said: “Trying to pressure people now creates a cloud over a process that didn’t need to be there but for the government’s division in their own ranks”.

Labor’s climate spokesman Mark Butler said that people across Australia would be asking themselves “how can you have any confidence that this decision was made on the merits of the case rather than because of the internal division and chaos in this government?”.

Morrison government approves next step towards Adani coal mine

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Read more: [Grattan on Friday: Scott Morrison struggles to straddle the south-north divide](#)

The Australian Conservation Foundation's Christian Slattery said "Coal-loving Coalition MPs appear to have strongarmed the Environment Minister into granting Adani access to Queensland's precious groundwater on the eve of the election".

Slattery said that if Price had been pressured to rush through the approval ahead of the election, the decision might be open to legal challenge.

He said the Queensland government was yet to sign off on Adani's Black-Throated Finch Management Plan and Groundwater Dependent Ecosystem Management Plan.

"And, importantly, Adani does not have federal approval for the proposed above-ground water infrastructure it requires to support its proposed thirsty coal mine," Slattery said.

GetUp said there would be a backlash against the decision. "The Coalition can expect to lose a swathe of seats around Australia for their capitulation to a single coal company at the expense of the community.

"A storm of local groups are already hard at work in Kooyong and Flinders, and now GetUp is going to make an extra 100,000 calls into Flinders and 80,000 calls into Kooyong. This could cost Josh Frydenberg and Greg Hunt their jobs".

Tasmanian independent MP Andrew Wilkie said: "This decision is environmental vandalism at its most extreme, facilitated by the most useless environment minister the country's ever seen".

In a statement Adani complained about its treatment from the Queensland government.

Morrison government approves next step towards Adani coal mine

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

“Throughout the past 18 months, the Federal Department provided us with certainty of process and timing, including the steps involved in the independent review by CSIRO and Geoscience Australia experts.

In contrast, the Queensland government has continued to shift the goal posts when it comes to finalising the outstanding environmental management plans for the mine and is standing in the way of thousands of jobs for Queenslanders.

It’s time the Queensland government gave us a fair go and stopped shifting the goal posts so we can get on with delivering these jobs.”

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

Authors: Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Read more <http://theconversation.com/morrison-government-approves-next-step-towards-adani-coal-mine-115133>