

Mr Lee K Curtis
Protect the Bush Alliance
PO Box 1040
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Dear Mr Curtis

Thank you for your letter of 31 January 2014 to the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, concerning the Galilee Coal Mine and Rail Project (EPBC 2009/4737). The Minister has passed your letter to me for reply. I regret the delay in responding.

On 19 December 2013, the Minister approved the Galilee Coal Mine and Rail project under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. In approving the project, the Minister imposed 49 strict conditions to avoid, mitigate and manage impacts to matters of national environmental significance. Further information on the project, the conditions of approval and the Secretary's Recommendation Report, are available at: www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/epbc/epbc_ap.pl?name=current_referral_detail&proposal_id=4737.

Although the Bimblebox Nature Refuge is not itself a nationally protected matter, the assessment carefully considered the site's values and importance as habitat for nationally protected matters, such as listed threatened species and communities. The conditions of approval limit the amount of habitat that can be disturbed for listed threatened species and the Brigalow threatened ecological community. Land based offsets are required for any significant residual impacts after mitigation measures are applied. For example, the proponent will need to secure and manage 10,000 hectares of primary habitat for the Black-throated Finch and 6,000 hectares of primary habitat for the Squatter Pigeon for environmental gain. The offsets will be located within areas identified by Queensland as part of the Galilee Basin Offset Strategy for their biodiversity values.

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 Environmental Offsets Policy 2012* (The Offset Policy) was applied to determine the offset requirements for this project. The Offset Policy uses a range of information, including the ecological values of impacted areas and the proposed offset property, to establish a suitable offset for a project. Further information about the Offset Policy is available at: www.environment.gov.au/resource/epbc-act-environmental-offsets-policy.

The assessment included the consideration of the project's potential impacts, including cumulative impacts, on water resources. The Minister's decision was informed by advice from the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development (the Committee). The Committee's advice on the project is publically available at: www.environment.gov.au/coal-seam-gas-mining/advice/proposals.html.

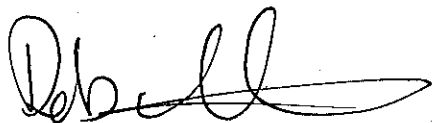
You may also be interested in the Committee's Bioregional Assessment Programme (the Programme). Through the Programme, scientific analyses are being undertaken of the ecology, hydrology, geology and hydrogeology of a number of areas, including the Galilee Basin, with explicit assessment of the potential direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of coal seam gas and large coal mining development on water resources. The assessments will consider the potential impacts on entities connected to both water dependent ecological assets (such as groundwater dependent ecosystems) and anthropogenic assets (such as irrigation schemes).

The Galilee Basin Bioregional Assessment is one of the Programme's priorities for completion. In each region, scientific products will be delivered over the life of the assessment, leading to a continual increase in the information and analysis available. Further information about the Bioregional Assessment Programme, including the scientific methodology for undertaking the assessments and a map of the assessment areas, is at: www.environment.gov.au/coal-seam-gas-mining/bioregional-assessments.html.

While you may not agree with the Minister's decision to approve the project, the assessment process was rigorous and the Minister determined that with the conditions of approval in place, the environmental impacts of the project will be acceptable.

Thank you for providing your views on this assessment.

Yours sincerely



Deb Callister
Assistant Secretary
Queensland and Sea Dumping Assessment Branch

14 March 2014