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Monday, September 29, 2014 9:58 AM EST

Environment Ministry OKs \$2.2B North Galilee Basin Rail Project On 23 Conditions

By Vittorio Hernandez

Environment Minister Greg Hunt approved over the weekend the \$2.2 billion North Galilee Basin Rail project. However, the final approval would be based on Indian mining company Adani meeting 23 conditions.

The project would run 310 kilometres on a 100 metre-wide corridor, connecting the Carmichael Coal Mine to the Abbott Point port. Once completed, it could carry up to 100 million tonnes.

Hunt gave Adani five year to begin work on the rail then it must get further written approval from the environment ministry. During the construction phase of the project, it is expected to contribute about \$800 million to Queensland's economy and generate 2,000 construction jobs.

When operational, the rail would create 270 operational jobs.

Among the 23 conditions are crafting of a biodiversity offset strategy which must be submitted at least two months before Adani begins construction, establishment of limits for endangered species in the area, use of fauna spotters before and during the clearance of the land and annual online release of Adani's compliance report.

Besides the rail project, Adani got in July 2014 environmental approval from Hunt for its \$16.5-billion Carmichael coal mine, which has an estimated operating life of about 90 years. Adani is expected to extract 4 billion tonnes of coal from Carmichael, the bulk of which would be shipped to India through Abbott Point.

With a yearly projected output of 60 million tonnes, Adani is expected to be the largest coal mine in Australia. But pro-environment groups are opposed to the mine. Landowners are also wary about how the rail project would affect flooding since it would pass through flood plains.

To assuage the groups opposed to the rail system, Hunt said the strict 23 conditions ensure there is overall net benefit for the environment.

The Galilee Basin has one of the biggest unexploited mining areas in Australia. In 2008, Waratah Coal said it discovered 4,400 million tonnes of coal in the region. Other developments in Galilee includes Hancock Coal, Alpha Coal Project of GVK and China First mine of Clive Palmer.