

# Indian conservationist brings action against Queensland coal project

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An Indian conservationist has lodged legal action against a Queensland coal project on behalf of Indian communities.

Debi Goenka, of India's Conservation Trust, travelled to Queensland to lodge legal objections to Indian company Adani's plans for Australia's largest coalmine, the \$16 billion Carmichael mine project, in the state's central interior.

He said the tens of millions of tonnes of coal the mine was due to ship to the subcontinent each year would adversely impact on local communities.

It is thought to be the first time an international entity has taken legal action against an Australian coal project.

Both the federal and state governments have approved the Galilee Basin project, which, once at capacity, aims to produce an estimated 60 million tonnes of steaming coal every year, with the mine predicted to have a lifespan of between 60 and 90 years.

The project was approved with myriad environmental conditions and the Queensland government is relying on it to help turn around the economy and offset job losses from the natural gas industry, which is now moving from the construction to production stage.

But Mr Goenka said the project would prove "bad for both countries".

He had previously asked the federal government to consider the "fisher people, salt panners and small farmers" off the coast of the port of Mundra, where the coal is destined, saying it would be "burnt in dirty, dangerous power stations that pollute the air we breathe", with the toxic waste "damaging our ability to make our living, which is already difficult".

"We are concerned about Adani's track record in India," he said.

"And the idea of them mining the largest mine in Australia, producing 60 million tonnes of coal and exporting to India, is quite horrifying."

Mr Goenka said the Mundra port project in India, which he said was similar in size to the Abbot Point port project, which is being expanded to deal with the Galilee coal projects, had been issued with violations and multimillion-dollar fines for environmental breaches.

He said the coal from the Carmichael mine project was a "direct threat" to the health and livelihoods of communities that lived and worked near the Mundra port and power stations "as it will dramatically increase pollution and damage the local environment upon which communities depend for their subsistence".

A spokesman for Adani disputed Mr Goenka's claims and said the Carmichael project was "subject to some of the most strict and stringent environmental conditions ever imposed by the Queensland and Commonwealth governments".

"Adani welcomes these environmental protections that balance the need for development with our recognised need to protect the environment - adhering to these strict protections helps build confidence in the communities in which we live and work, and is key to our plan to build a long-term future with Queensland," he said.

"As an example, our port at Abbot Point has operated safely and without incident for 30 years. "The high-quality, cost-efficient coal from the Carmichael mine is key to helping Adani light the lives of 100 million Indians.

"... Anti-coal activists such as Debi Goenka, in effect, seek to not only export the 10,000 jobs, \$22 billion in taxes and royalties, and opportunities for local supply opportunities this creates from well-regulated jurisdictions such as Australia with its strict environmental protections – they seek to deny tens of millions of Indians the basics that affordable energy helps provide."

Queensland Deputy Premier Jeff Seeney said he was confident the conditions imposed on the mine project and the monitoring that went with them would limit any damage to the local environment.

"Queensland and Australia's environmental regulations are world class and every resource company operating in our state must comply with them," he said.

"The Carmichael coalmine underwent approximately four years of rigorous assessment, both by the Queensland Coordinator-General and the Australian Government.

"It was approved subject to 36 Commonwealth environmental conditions and 190 state environmental conditions, ensuring protection of water supplies in the Great Artesian Basin, local biodiversity and other important environmental considerations.

"These conditions will be carefully monitored to ensure environmental compliance."

Mr Goenka wasn't so sure.

"The Indian government had confidence that Adani would adhere to the Indian environmental law and they haven't," he said.

"They have done lots of things in their project in Mundra which are clearly illegal and we are quite concerned that they might do exactly the same thing in Australia."

The case, which was lodged on behalf of Mr Goenka by law firm and advocacy Environmental Justice Australia, is expected to be heard early next year.

Work on the Carmichael mine is also slated to begin next year.

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/queensland/indian-conservationist-brings-action-against-queensland-coal-project-20141025-11bo5s.html>*