

25 February 2020

Mr Grant Hehir
Auditor-General
Australian National Audit Office
Barton ACT 2600

By email: grant.hehir@anao.gov.au

Dear Auditor-General

Commonwealth environmental approvals process for the Adani Carmichael coal mine

I write regarding the current performance audit being undertaken by ANAO regarding “*Referrals, assessments and approvals of controlled actions under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*” (‘EPBC Act Audit’).

I request that this audit consider the process followed in approving the Adani Carmichael Coal Mine and Rail Project (2010/5736), particularly approval of the groundwater management plans, in light of recent information regarding political donations.

On 3 February 2020, the Australian Electoral Commission published the 2018-2019 donor returns. Significantly, those returns reveal that Adani Group companies (via Adani Mining Pty Ltd and Carmichael Rail Network Pty Ltd) donated \$247,000 to the Liberal and National parties. Of this amount, \$12,500 was donated in the week prior to the decision by the former Environment Minister, Hon Melissa Price MP, to approve Adani’s groundwater management plans and \$200,000 was donated in the month following that decision.

The Minister’s approval was made despite a scathing report from the CSIRO and Geoscience Australia that concluded:

- “The modelling used is not suitable to ensure the outcomes sought by the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* are met”; and
- “[Adani’s plan is] “not sufficiently robust to monitor and minimise impacts to protected environments”.

The ABC at the time reported that Minister Price was under pressure from colleagues in the Queensland Liberal-National Party to approve the groundwater management plan before the Federal election was called (see <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-09/adani-gains-commonwealth-groundwater-approval/10984134>).

The 2018-19 AEC donor returns raise important questions about the integrity of the assessment. I request that the EPBC Act Audit specifically review the approvals granted by Minister Price in April 2019, including an examination of how scientific advice was considered and governance arrangements to ensure that approval decisions were not influenced by irrelevant considerations.

Yours sincerely,



Larissa Waters
Australian Greens Senate Leader
Spokesperson for Democracy, Mining & Resources