

## Bimblebox Nature Refuge and Waratah Coal - Galilee Coal Project Backgrounder

### About Bimblebox Nature Refuge

Bimblebox Nature Refuge is an almost 8000 hectare, 95% uncleared sanctuary in central west Queensland, approximately 500 km west of Rockhampton and 30km north west of the town of Alpha.

It is composed of remnant semi-arid woodlands with an understorey largely made up of native shrubs, forbs and grasses, and has a [rich diversity of birds](#) (more than 150 species recorded so far), reptiles and other native animals. In May 2011 a flock of endangered [Black Throated Finch](#) (*Poephila cincta cincta*) was sighted on Bimblebox, which has been confirmed by Birds Australia.

Bimblebox is a genuine and rare example of how agricultural production and biodiversity conservation can co-exist. A small herd of beef cattle assist in the control of exotic pasture grasses, and a number of long-term [research projects](#) are aimed at generating knowledge and management practices to improve outcomes for biodiversity across the region.

Formerly Glen Innes Station, Bimblebox was secured in 2000, when Queensland's land clearing rates were amongst the highest in the world. It was purchased with the savings of a number of concerned individuals, as well as funding from the Australian National Reserve System program, 'Caring for our Country', to save it from being cleared.

In 2002, as required, the Bimblebox Nature Refuge Agreement (category VI IUCN protected area) was signed with the Queensland state government to permanently protect the high conservation values of the property.

#### Birds

So far 158 bird species have been observed at Bimblebox, including the state and nationally endangered Black-throated Finch, the nationally vulnerable Squatter Pigeon and the state listed Near Threatened Black-chinned Honeyeater and Black-necked Stork. In addition, 14 birds of Conservation Significance for the Desert Uplands have been recorded there, including the Black-necked Stork, Letter-winged Kite, Black Falcon, Australian Bustard, Bush Stone Curlew, Brown Treecreeper, Speckled Warbler, Inland Thornbill, White-eared Honeyeater, Black-chinned Honeyeater, Hooded Robin and Grey-Crowned Babbler<sup>1</sup>.

#### Vertebrates

At least 45 vertebrate species are present, including the Common Wallaroo, Whiptail Wallaby, Northern Brown Bandicoot, Squirrel Glider, Rufous Bettong, Short-beaked Echidna and Inland Forest Bat. A large number of reptile species are found, including the Mulga Snake (a species of conservation significance in the Desert Uplands bioregion), Black-headed Python, Pale-headed Snake, Frill-necked Lizard, Eastern Bearded Dragon, Central Netted Dragon, Central Bearded Dragon, Eastern Blue-tongued Lizard, Nobby Dragon, Byrnoe's Gecko and Spiny Knob-tailed Gecko. Koala habitat is present, but the Koalas have not been sighted since early 2000's.

#### Flora

Over 95% of Bimblebox Nature Refuge consists of remnant woodland and it is one of the largest such tracts in the region<sup>2</sup>. Two of its thriving ecosystems are listed as Regional Ecosystems of

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper, Maureen (ed.) (2013) Bimblebox – A Nature Refuge under Siege (120pp)

<sup>2</sup> Cassoni, P. and Duus, S (2011) SUBMISSION on Waratah Coal's Environmental Impact Statement

Concern<sup>3</sup>. There have been 287 plant species found on Bimblebox, including the Near-Threatened Large-podded Tick-trefoil. Iconic trees include Bimblebox (Poplar Box, the main Koala food tree at Bimblebox), Silver-leaved Ironbark and Brigalow. The main Koala food tree is Poplar Box, while Queensland Blue Gum and River Red Gum are also represented.

## Galilee Coal Project

Waratah Coal, through its Galilee Coal Project (Northern Export Facility) seeks to develop open-cut and underground coal mines and a standard-gauge railway line<sup>4</sup>. On or around the 4 October 2019 a Public Notice posted on the Queensland Government's Notices of mining lease applications website<sup>5</sup> advised of Waratah Coal's intention to secure its mining lease (ML). On the 18 October 2019 Waratah Coal advertised a Public Notice within the CQ News newspaper for the environmental authority (EA) and ML.

The Galilee Coal Project is a large export thermal coal mine proposed for the southern Galilee Basin, 30 km north of the township of Alpha, Central Queensland. The project proposes open cut mines, underground longwall mines, and a 453 km standard gauge railway line from the mine to the Abbot Point coal terminal (Abbot Point SDA boundary).

Waratah Coal propose to develop the Galilee Coal Project that includes:

- Mine - 4 x underground coal mines, 2 x open-cut coal mines
- Coal Extraction: 56 Mt/y ROM coal, 40 Mt/y product coal
- Mine lease period: 35 years
- Coal Quality: 6350 kcal/kg<sup>6</sup> (adb) and 5500 kcal/kg (NAR)
- Railway: 453 km standard-gauge railway line from the mine to Abbot Point
- Water Access: sourced via groundwater ingress and localised ML rainfall
- Energy Access: sourced from the grid via pole and power-line
- Airport: Alpha Aerodrome as the FIFO transit hub
- Impacted land: The 4877.49 ha of remnant vegetation clearance comprises 31 per cent of the total clearing required for the project<sup>7</sup>
- Impacted watercourse: Lagoon Creek, Malcolm Creek and Saltbush Creek. Greater than 7km<sup>8</sup>
- Impacted protected area: Bimblebox Nature Refuge
- Impacted properties: 7 grazing properties directly impacted by mining operations

Waratah has advised that the construction duration for each open-cut mine would be 18 months; each underground mine, 2 years; and the rail, 3 years<sup>9</sup>.

Under the name of China First Coal Project, Waratah Coal lodged its application for ML 70454 on the 30 May 2011 and EA on the 27 May 2011. Between 2009 and 2013 an Environmental impact statement (EIS) and Supplementary information to EIS (SEIS) was developed and provided for community consultation and submissions. Waratah Coal has secured the following:

3 Cassoni, P (2009) Submission. EPBC Referral [https://bimblebox.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Referral\\_2009-4737\\_webversion.pdf](https://bimblebox.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Referral_2009-4737_webversion.pdf)

4 Department State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, 'Galilee Coal Project', n.d., <http://statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/coordinator-general/assessments-and-approvals/coordinated-projects/completed-projects/galilee-coal-project.html>.

5 Mines and Energy Natural Resources, 'Mining Lease Application Notices', Text, n.d., <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/minerals-coal/authorities-permits/applying/mining-lease-application>.

6 Waratah Coal Pty Ltd, 'Galilee Coal Project (Northern Export Facility) - Waratah Coal', Galilee coal project (northern export facility), n.d., <https://www.waratahcoal.com/galilee-coal-project-northern-export-facility-coal-project/>.

7 Department State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, sPage 41.

8 Department State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, 'Galilee Coal Project (Northern Export Facility) Coordinator-General's Evaluation Report on the Environmental Impact Statement' (State of Queensland, August 2013), sPage 63., <http://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/resources/project/china-first-coal/galilee-coal-cg-report.pdf>.

9 Department State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, sPage 21.

1. 9 August 2013 the Queensland Coordinator General issued its Coordinator General's evaluation report on the environmental impact statement (CG Evaluation Report), which included draft conditions of approval, and other recommendations;
2. 18 December 2013, the Federal Minister for the Environment approved the project with conditions<sup>10</sup> under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC);
3. 4 December 2015 the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) issued a draft environmental authority EPML00571313 (Draft EA) for the Galilee Coal Mine that states draft conditions of approval<sup>11</sup>.

Through its Public Notice for ML 70454, as certified by Qld Department of Natural Resources, Mine and Energy (DNRME), Waratah Coal advise objections to the application must be lodged on or before the 2 December 2019<sup>12</sup>.

On naming: The Waratah Coal's Galilee Basin coal mine is and has been known by various names. The Waratah Coal website names the development as Galilee Coal Project. The Department of State Development website lists it as Galilee Coal Project (Northern Export Facility). Its ML and EA applications were made using China First Coal Project. The Draft EA it is known as the Galilee Coal Mine. This document will use Galilee Coal Project.

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10 Department of Environment and Energy, 'Referral Details · EPBC Approval 2009/4737', 18 December 2013, <http://epbcnotices.environment.gov.au/referralslist/referral-details/?id=8b737a12-4c67-e511-b4b8-005056ba00ab#>.

11 Queensland Department of Environment and Science, 'Draft Environmental Authority Galilee Coal Mine EPML00571313' (Queensland Government, 4 December 2015), [http://www.waratahcoal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2\\_EA-Draft-Permit.pdf](http://www.waratahcoal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2_EA-Draft-Permit.pdf).

12 Department of Natural Resources, Mine and Energy, 'Notice for Mining Lease No. 40454' (Queensland Government, 4 October 2019), [https://www.dnrme.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1457649/notice-ml-70454.pdf](https://www.dnrme.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1457649/notice-ml-70454.pdf).

# Map

2015 map showing Bimblebox Nature Refuge (in green) within the yellow mine footprint

