

## Palaszczuk asked to step in to save Adani coalmine



Queensland Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk. Picture: AAP

Jared Owens, 12:00AM February 16, 2019

Adani and Queensland's Labor government were last night in a stand-off over the legitimacy of a controversial state-commissioned report, with the Indian conglomerate rejecting key findings that now threaten the progress of its proposed Carmichael coalmine.

As Deputy Premier Jackie Trad demanded Adani co-operate with the 11th-hour review of its strategy to protect an endangered finch, the Labor government was facing an outcry over perceptions it was undermining the project as it was about to begin construction.

An extraordinary alliance of industry, unions and councils were last night in talks to lobby for Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk's intervention to save the project that promises thousands of jobs.

The contentious review of Adani's black-throated finch management plan was ordered by Environment Minister Leanne Enoch's department in December, just weeks after Adani announced it had funding for the mine.

The findings of the review — chaired by Brendan Wintle, a Melbourne University academic associated with anti-coal activism — are set to delay

construction of the mine, which cannot begin without state approval of the plan to protect the endangered bird.

After Ms Trad yesterday called on Adani to “engage in the process” led by Professor Wintle, Adani chief executive Lucas Dow claimed the review’s “misinformed and conflicting findings” demonstrated the report was biased and must be scrapped. In a letter to the government, Mr Dow outlines five key areas where he says the review contradicts the previous evidence accepted by the Environment Department, which had workshopped the plan with the company over 18 months and seven drafts before it was submitted.

Scott Morrison yesterday cautioned the state government against “playing games” with jobs in north Queensland, which already suffered high unemployment before it was ravaged by floods this month. “I think the people of Queensland are dealing with enough at the moment without having decisions to take away their jobs,” the Prime Minister said. “We support the mining industry. We want to see mining jobs and we want to be able to see projects stand on their two feet and be given a go on the basis of their commercial realities.”

Ms Trad said Adani had an obligation to provide its feedback to the department so it could be reviewed by Professor Wintle before his final report went to the department. “If they don’t like that process then the alternative is for them to essentially do what they’re doing, which is run a political campaign,” the Deputy Premier said.

Minerals Council of Australia chief executive Tania Constable said the government’s selection of Professor Wintle seemed to be designed to ensure the project wouldn’t go ahead. “They should have given it to an independent umpire, and they handed it straight to an organisation that they knew would deliver an outcome to reject some of those findings,” she said.

Ms Enoch said Labor would not be bullied into cutting corners. “The decision to seek an independent expert review of the black-throated finch management plan was made by the Department of Environment and Science, as the - regulator, free of political interference,” she said. Ms Enoch said the appointment of Tim Seelig — a stalwart opponent of the mine as head of the Queensland Conservation Council — as a top adviser to her director-general followed an “open, merit-based appointment process”.

Queensland Resources Council chief executive Ian Macfarlane said the appointment created the appearance of bias. “In the end, it’s important that all departments are seen to be impartial as well as being impartial so all parties have confidence in them,” he said. “Would the conservation movement have confidence in the department if, for instance, I was in Seelig’s place?”