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Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submitted online

12 September 2025

RE: QCC submission to Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy

Queensland Conservation Council Inc. (QCC) welcomes the opportunity to provide comments to the Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy.

QCC is the peak body for environmental groups in Queensland. Since 1969, we have worked to support communities in protecting their environment and climate. Today we represent 61 groups and more than 20,000 members across the state, many of whom are already experiencing the impacts of climate change and unsustainable development on their communities and landscapes.

Queenslanders are on the frontline of climate change impacts. Our state has faced devastating floods, cyclones, bushfires and coral bleaching events in recent years. At the same time, Queenslanders are also at the centre of national debates about coal and gas exports, energy transition, and regional economic futures.

The Queensland Conservation Council acknowledges that we meet and work across the many lands of Queensland. We wish to pay respect to their Elders - past and present - and acknowledge the important role all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play in protecting, conserving and sustaining Queensland.

Be it misinformation (unintentional) or disinformation (intentional), the outcome of spreading misleading information in a climate change and energy context have the same outcome, posing a serious threat to public debate, democratic decision-making, and effective action to protect communities. Our submission highlights these threats, and the solutions, using the coal lobby group Coal Australia as a case study.

Coal Australia is a well-funded lobby group astroturfing as a grassroots campaign

Coal Australia are a political lobby group formed in August 2024 ahead of the Queensland Election and were discretely involved in the election of the pro-coal LNP government¹. They are a textbook example of astroturfing: the practice of creating industry-backed organisations that mimic genuine grassroots groups

The group’s branding, language, and spokespeople are designed to create the appearance of a broad-based community movement. In reality, it amplifies the voices of coal executives while sidelining workers, Traditional Owners, and regional communities advocating for transition.

For example, the group was not launched to a crowd of coal workers, it was launched to a room of executives and politicians at an exclusive private club in Brisbane, right before the Queensland election².

Within three months of their launch event at an exclusive event at Tattersall’s club, they’d raised over one million dollars³ from undisclosed donors. This money was promptly funnelled into pro-nuclear think tanks like the Australian Institute for Progress (AIP) and Australians for Prosperity (AFP). AIP take credit for the election of the pro-coal government in the Queensland Election last year, explicitly thanking Coal Australia for making that happen and detailing the money and tactics that were used in their campaign which “targeted the seats that would determine whether the LNP won a workable majority”⁴. AFP received \$725,000 from Coal Australia, and have since come under fire for potentially unauthorised electoral advertising⁵. Coal Australia founder, Nick Jorss, is also transparently behind pro-nuclear research⁶.

Coal Australia’s misleading narratives

Coal Australia provides a clear example of the deliberate spread of disinformation in Queensland (and New South Wales). While it presents itself as a representative of “workers and communities,” its leadership and funding are tied directly to coal industry executives and

¹ Australian Institute for Progress (2024), [Report on AIP state election campaign: We made a critical difference.](#)

² Mining News (9 August 2024), [Coal industry flexes its muscle ahead of Queensland state election in October.](#)

³ Sydney Morning Herald (23 Oct 2024), *How third-party players are spending big to influence the Queensland State Election.*

⁴ Australian Institute for Progress (2024), [Report on AIP state election campaign: We made a critical difference.](#)

⁵ ABC (11 April 2025), [Coal-funded Australians for Prosperity deletes posts after AEC intervention.](#)

⁶ ABC (22 Nov 2024), [Coalition-linked nuclear expert questioned by parliament over coal industry ties.](#)

corporations. They have access to substantial resources for advertising and political campaigning, using mainstream media, paid digital campaigns, their regular newsletter (Appendix A), and sponsored content and opinion pieces in newspapers that appear to be neutral journalism (Appendix B).

They use these channels to promote false narratives that have been disproven by economics and science (Table 1), undermining trust in evidence-based science. The financing and scale of these efforts dwarf the capacity of community groups and distort the democratic balance of voices, particularly during elections.

Table 1: Coal Australia’s claims vs. evidence

Misleading claim	Fact	Implications
Coal is essential for jobs and community survival ⁷ (Appendix A and B).	Research shows that coal mining jobs are decreasing as automation and cleaner energy sources take over. ⁸ The global demand for coal is in decline, and countries are transitioning to clean energy to stay competitive. Australia’s reliance on coal exports risks isolating us in the global market.	Not only ignores the long and short term risk of climate change to community survival, it creates resistance to job diversification, delaying the transition to cleaner, more sustainable industries. Regional economies miss out on emerging green jobs. Also risks Australia falling behind in the global energy transition, missing out on investment opportunities in renewable energy sectors, and becoming increasingly vulnerable to international market shifts.
Climate policies are a threat to regional Queenslanders (Appendix A and B).	Transitioning to renewable energy can diversify regional economies, providing new jobs in sectors like wind, solar, and battery storage. Renewable energy investments already show significant regional job creation. A lack of climate policy will impact regional Queenslanders, be it through loss of homes, unaffordable insurance premiums, rising grocery costs, and	Erodes trust in science-based policy making and discourages proactive regional engagement in energy transition, risking continued reliance on coal and exacerbating climate vulnerability.

⁷ Coal Australia (2025), [FAQs - How many people does the industry employ / Are regional communities dependent on coal?](#)

⁸ ARENA (2023), [Australian Industry Energy Transitions Initiative](#).

Misleading claim	Fact	Implications
	<p>damage to our physical and mental health. Since 2022, the direct costs of extreme weather events, in insured losses, has topped \$5 billion⁹. The uninsured losses and indirect losses in reduced agricultural output, lost economic activity and public infrastructure rebuild are often more than double the direct insured losses¹⁰, meaning Queenslanders are footing a further \$10 billion bill over the past three years. The cost of unnatural disasters by 2060 could reach \$96 billion a year in Australia, with Queensland bearing the brunt of these costs¹¹. By just 2030, 6.5% of Queensland properties are likely to be uninsurable¹². By 2035 one in 25 homes in Australia may become uninsurable due to flooding¹³.</p>	
<p>Coal royalties are crippling the industry (Appendix A and B).</p>	<p>Royalties make up proportionally less of coal mining operating costs in 2025 compared to 2018, while other factors like labour shortages actually drive up costs¹⁴. The higher royalty rates only apply when prices are high, and resulting profits by coal miners are greater. Royalties are a benefit to the community in terms of infrastructure, education, and health. They can and should be used to fund the transition¹⁵.</p>	<p>Frames often multinational corporations as victims and suppresses genuine voices like Traditional Owners, regional communities, and workers advocating for just transition. Contributes to the industry's tax avoidance and continued subsidies at the expense of public funding.</p>
<p>Communities must “choose between” coal</p>	<p>As of December 2024, coal mines in Queensland reported they employ</p>	<p>Creates division in regional communities, limiting local</p>

⁹ Insurance Council of Australia (2025) [Catastrophes](#)

¹⁰ Deloitte (2022) [The social, financial and economic costs of the 2022 South East Queensland Rainfall and Flooding Event](#) Report for the Queensland Reconstruction Authority

¹¹ Deloitte (2021) [Special report: Update to the economic costs of natural disasters in Australia](#) report for the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience & Safer Communities

¹² Climate Council (2022) [Uninsurable Nation](#)

¹³ Australian National University (2024), [Submission: Impact of Climate Risk on Insurance Premiums and Availability](#).

¹⁴ IEEFA (4 Aug 2025), [Labour shortages, not royalties, are driving up costs at Australia's underground coalmines](#).

¹⁵ John Quiggan via The Guardian (17 June 2022), [Now is the perfect time to increase coal royalties to fund Australia's energy transition](#).

Misleading claim	Fact	Implications
jobs and climate action ¹⁶ .	40,000 people ¹⁷ . JobsQueensland estimates coal mining jobs will be more like 30,000 come 2027 ¹⁸ . By any estimate, that's far less than the more than 60,000 employed on the Great Barrier Reef. Renewable energy projects create more employment opportunities than coal mining.	solutions and resistance to diversification into sustainable employment sectors. At 2 degrees of warming, it is likely that coral reefs around the world will decline by 99% ¹⁹ . This is a dire prediction for Great Barrier Reef, the jobs it supports, and the estimated economic value of \$AU56 billion it generates ²⁰ .
Challenging a coal project is considered lawfare ²¹ .	Local communities, Traditional Owners, and environmental groups regularly engage in lawful processes to challenge coal projects, highlighting environmental impacts and land rights. This is a vital part of a healthy, functioning democracy, and explicitly seen as part of the mining lease approval pathway.	Minimises the rights of communities to challenge harmful projects, deters necessary scrutiny, and undermines democratic processes and environmental protections.
Coal is essential to create steel ²² .	"Metallurgical", also known as "steelmaking" coal, is also being sold to power plants and burnt for energy - just like "thermal" coal, when prices are high. It's a loophole coal corporations are exploiting to win finance and dig more climate-wrecking coal for their own profits ²³ . Regardless, cleaner alternatives now exist such as green hydrogen-based steelmaking.	Falsely conflates thermal and metallurgical coal to justify the entire coal industry. It obstructs investment in low-carbon steel technologies, misleads the public and policymakers, and prolongs dependence on fossil fuels, even when viable, cleaner steel production alternatives exist.

¹⁶ Coal Australia (2025), [FAQs - How many people does the industry employ / Are regional communities dependent on coal?](#)

¹⁷ Queensland Government (2025), [Old quarterly mine and quarry worker numbers on 30 June 2025](#).

¹⁸ Jobs Queensland (2025), [Anticipating future skills: Mining](#).

¹⁹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2023) [Sixth Assessment Report: Summary for Policymakers](#)

²⁰ Great Barrier Reef Foundation (2025) [The Value](#)

²¹ The Australian (21 January 2025), [Queensland's New Acland coal mine to expand operations after win against environmental lawfare](#).

²² Coal Australia (2025), [FAQs - What is coal used for?](#)

²³ Bloomberg (24 June 2025), [Coal loophole undermines bank pledges to cut fossil-fuel funding](#).

Recommendations

Coal Australia is just one example of the threats unabated misinformation and disinformation has on our democracy, particularly when it comes to climate change policy. To ensure fair, democratic and evidence-based responses to the climate impacts Queenslanders are already experiencing, we must confront the spread of misinformation and disinformation that undermines public debate through the following recommendations:

1. Ban and limit fossil fuel advertising in line with tobacco and gambling advertising restrictions.
2. Resource independent watchdogs to monitor and expose fossil fuel misinformation campaigns.
3. Embed media literacy education in the secondary school curriculum, including distinguishing the difference between evidence-based science and industry astroturfing and spin.
4. Prioritise genuine community voices, particularly regional and First Nations voices, in public policy debates about energy transition.

Without stronger regulation and investment in media literacy, industry-funded misinformation will continue to distort policy, delay action, and increase harm to Queenslanders. We urge the Committee to recommend stronger safeguards to protect the integrity of public debate on climate change and energy.

Yours sincerely,

Dave Copeman

Director, Queensland Conservation Council

Appendix A - Coal Australia newsletter excerpts

Full versions of these emails are available on request.

10th March 2025 - Denies fossil fuels are linked to climate change

From: "Stuart Bocking, Coal Australia"

Date: 7 March 2025 at 4:08:23 m AEST

Subject: Staying Safe in Cyclone Alfred



Dear [REDACTED]

This week's newsletter comes as Cyclone Alfred moves towards southeast Queensland and the northern coast of New South Wales.

Many of our member companies and associate members are based in and around Brisbane, and our thoughts are with them and their employees.

I know items like gas bottles and ice are already in short supply as residents prepare for Alfred's landfall in the early hours of tomorrow. The scale of the threat is evident, with schools, public transport, major roads, and airports already closed.

If you are in a potentially affected area, please follow official advice. While we hope for the best, authorities are urging everyone to prepare for the worst.

It is disappointing - though not surprising - to see groups like the Climate Council attempting to politicise a natural disaster, **linking fossil fuels to extreme weather events. Now is not the time for such nonsense.**

On a brighter note, Coal Australia's Steph Black attended the ALS/ACTest Newcastle morning tea for International Women's Day.

Steph, recently featured in Newcastle Weekly Magazine, was invited as a guest speaker at the event. Here she is, rocking one of our newly arrived bucket hats:

1st April 2025 - Billboard advertising

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Stuart Bocking, Coal Australia**

Date: Fri, 28 Mar 2025 at 4:03 pm

Subject: Election Called, Budget Ignored Coal, and Brisbane's Olympic Legacy Begins



Dear 

It has been a momentous morning with the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese making the short drive from Parliament House to Yarralumla to visit the Governor-General, calling a general election for May 3 2025.

Coal Australia has been in Canberra this week for the federal budget and the traditional budget reply speech delivered by Peter Dutton.

Despite coal driving so much prosperity across our mining communities, the government's fourth budget in three years failed to mention coal at all.

Coal Australia sees that as a missed opportunity to drive downward pressure on energy bills, and here is the [budget media release](#) we issued on Wednesday morning.

I was keen to talk up the benefits of coal and the importance of our coal mining communities with several senior ministers, including Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles.



Politicians arriving into, and departing from, Canberra airport this week got a visual reminder of the value of coal and the men and women working for our members and associate members – these ads have been running at various sites around the airport.



Unsurprisingly, the Queensland government has overturned a pre-election commitment against a new stand-alone stadium for the Olympics.

The Victoria Park venue on the north side of the Brisbane CBD will have capacity for 63-thousand fans and will become the new home for AFL and cricket after the Games are held.

Going into elections, oppositions make various commitments without the benefit of departmental advice or a transparent look at the state's finances. Just as Sydney has benefitted from a purpose-built stadium for the 2000 Games, a new venue in Brisbane will be a lasting legacy from Queensland's staging of the Games.

And think about the volumes of steel needed to construct those venues; much of it fired by coal from Queensland's own Bowen basin.

The true extent of the coal royalties impact on Queensland's allocation of GST funding has become even more apparent this week. It follows revelations former Labor Treasurer Cameron Dick had set aside around \$2.5 billion as a contingency against lost GST revenue – we now discover that's gone; the former Labor government squandered it on a failed hydrogen project.

Coal Australia issued a follow up [media release](#) on the Queensland royalties earlier this week.

The sector is facing a tough period with falling coal prices, a punitive royalties regime, and rapidly rising production costs. It is a critical issue for Coal Australia and our members.

Congratulations to Coal Australia's Steph Black who attended the Women in Mining awards overnight – Steph was a finalist, and we are very proud of the work she does in support of coal mining communities.



8 August - Exclusive event with politicians in attendance, placed media

From: "Stuart Bocking, Coal Australia"
Date: 8 August 2025 at 4:01:57 pm AEST
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: From Moranbah to Brisbane: A Big Week for Coal



Dear [REDACTED]

The importance of coal took centre stage last night at the Tattersall's Club in Brisbane for the 4th annual Coal Industry Event.

What was started by Mining Pro's Grant Wechsel as a quiet gathering among friends, has been propelled into a night of nights.

Forget about the Lions, the Logies, or even Tay Tay, the combined Coal Australia/Mining Pro event was the hottest ticket in town.

More than 220 people turned out for the event, with the keynote address given by the Shadow Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, Susan McDonald.



The celebration of coal also featured a panel discussion on the challenges faced by the sector, and some of the opportunities that exist.



A big thank you to our panel members; MiningPro Founder & Chairman Grant Wechsel, Coal Australia Chairman Nick Jorss, QMetco Managing Director and CEO Andrew Boyd, and Aura Mining Managing Director Jason Economidis.

Coal Australia's recent visit to Moranbah was the subject of a video package that was played during last night's event at Tattersall's.

The video preceded the panel discussion, and provides a unique insight into the views of local business people and civic leaders in relation to coal mining and the prosperity it delivers for Queensland and the national economy.

You can watch the Moranbah video [here](#).

Earlier this week, I joined Adam Stephen on ABC Queensland Statewide Drive to discuss the coal mining sector and highlight the work Coal Australia is doing to support our producer members and associates.

You can click on the [link](#) to hear the interview.

Coal Australia Chairman Nick Jorss was on with Steve Austin in Brisbane this week, talking about the financial difficulties faced by his company Bowen Coking Coal, and particularly the impact of Queensland's

22nd August - Placed media

From: "Stuart Bocking, Coal Australia"

Date: 22 August 2025 at 5:14:10 pm AEST

Subject: Queensland's Royalty Regime puts Jobs at Risk



Dear [REDACTED]

Financial results released this week by Coal Australia member Whitehaven and by BHP have graphically demonstrated the combined impact of lower coal prices, sharply rising production costs, and the world's highest royalty regime in Queensland.

It's worth remembering that under the royalty scheme devised by the former Labor government, the top royalty rate in Queensland is 40 per-cent. That compares with a top rate in NSW of 10.8 per-cent.

In addition, those royalties are levied on sales revenue and not profits – it means that companies can be losing money but will still have contributed tens of millions of dollars in royalty payments to Queensland.

In the [Courier Mail](#) on Monday, Whitehaven CEO and Managing Director Paul Flynn featured in this article.

The Courier Mail 18 August 2025

Miners at tipping point Call for royalty review after losses, collapse

His full quotes for the story stated.

Attributable to Whitehaven CEO Paul Flynn:

“In the last 15 years, the coal mining sector added more than \$710 billion in value to the Queensland economy. Last year it contributed \$40 billion in direct spending to develop projects, pay salaries and wages, and support local businesses and community causes – accounting for 8% of Gross State Product.

Of course coal companies should pay their fair share in royalties. But all Queenslanders should know that this royalty regime – the highest anywhere in the world – is completely unsustainable. There is simply no prospect of Queensland’s coal sector being able to deliver the benefits all Queenslanders have shared in over the past decade if this punitive regime continues.

If mining companies are to continue to carry the risk of making large, multi-decade, capital investments in Queensland, the State Government must consider a sustainable royalty regime under which everyone can prosper.”

Mr Flynn’s comment about a regime “under which everyone can prosper” was brought into sharper focus just a day later, as the Queensland government unveiled a royalty deferral scheme for Bravus as part of a deal to bolster its investment in the Carmichael mine by \$50 million.

Following the release of the Whitehaven results, Paul Flynn spoke to the [Financial Review](#) pointing out that job losses and insolvencies in the Queensland coal sector prove that the state’s royalty regime is unsustainable.

FINANCIAL REVIEW 21 August 2025

Whitehaven blasts Queensland coal royalties as jobs go on the line

Mr Flynn adds the disparity in royalty rates is encouraging a shift in capital over the border into NSW – that would result in Queensland coal mining jobs being lost to NSW.

Coal Australia supports any signal that drives new investment in the coal mining sector, but the one-off deal for Bravus has prompted broader sector concerns about governments picking winners and losers.

I penned an editorial piece for the *Courier Mail*, which resulted in a news story in today's paper.

The Courier Mail 22 August 2025

Bravus Mining secures Qld royalty deal as rival coal miners struggle

You can read my opinion piece [here](#).

It's long been said there are lies, damned lies, and statistics – you can add to that, updated figures on the so-called energy transition.

Talk about fudging figures to suit a political narrative – instead, we will stick to the facts, and this graph says it all.

Appendix B - Coal Australia placed traditional media

Daily Telegraph - 30 December 2024

https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/solution-to-our-energy-crisis-is-right-under-our-feet/news-story/1cf2df1113cc93455466e1fa94fc468a?fbclid=IwY2xjawMu805leHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETFwSVFYWm5lN09Fc0pza3BaAR4we42t7Z0P4faEUxhCzRNFy98vu6SqkxQruTVfUBqSe2uA4pIZl0lI5bs0Gw_aem_eYOMHcrjhFAoUd_qieeZFw



The Australian - 21 August 2025

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/queenslands-new-acland-coal-mine-to-expand-operations-after-win-against-environmental-lawfare/news-story/c55804226fc7fc6dfff9d25db033363>

THE AUSTRALIAN

NATION

Queensland's New Acland coal mine to expand operations after win against environmental lawfare

By MACKENZIE SCOTT

ABC Drive - 8 August 2025

https://www.coalaustralia.com/abc_drive_with_adam_stephen?utm_campaign=20250808_weekly_update2&utm_medium=email&utm_source=coalau



COAL
AUSTRALIA

Stuart Bocking
CEO, Coal Australia

Speaks With

Adam Stephen
ABC Drive

 **FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND**

ancient proverb

10:12

Courier Mail - 22 August 2025

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/opinion/opinion-orwellian-overtones-in-qlds-royalties-sweetheart-deal/news-story/9dfbec5c8151eb4dbbd451f106b28726?btr=2a34dd21d5a47267b955aff5e711b13f>

News › Opinion

Opinion: Orwellian overtones in Qld's royalties sweetheart deal

Queensland's announcement this week of a special royalty deal for Bravus has parallels with a George Orwell classic, writes Stuart Bocking.

Stuart Bocking

 less than 2 min read August 22, 2025 - 12:00AM

 **Courier Mail**
www.couriermail.com.au

 14 Comments

Seven News - 4 September 2025

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/coalaustralia_coal-australia-ceo-stuart-bocking-recently-activity-7368820476703330304-V64H/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAB9wGaQBhOwzeJeTcwydRQ4B0iYzDT_aks



Sky News - 4 September 2025

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/coalaustralia_there-is-absolutely-a-path-for-coal-going-activity-7367043335594627072-lvdy?utm_source=social_share_send&utm_medium=member_desktop_web&rcm=ACoAAA5sJ6QByAesYuh618swWIkEIC18OPqILhY

