

Coal mine wins nod as state heads to polls

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Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk at the Isaac Plains coal mine, near the proposed Olive Downs, in Central Queensland yesterday.

Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk has moved to boost her mining credentials ahead of next month's state election by giving the green light to a new \$1 billion coal mine in central Queensland.

After Labor suffered a humiliating defeat in last year's federal election by not supporting Adani's controversial \$3 billion Carmichael mine, the Palaszczuk government has moved to embrace coal again, announcing yesterday that it had approved the mining lease for Pembroke Resources' Olive Downs metallurgical coal mine.

The 15 million tonnes-a-year mine, 40 kilometres south-east of Moranbah, is slightly bigger than Adani's 10 million tonnes-a-year coal mine, but is not as politically sensitive given it is coking coal, which is used for making steel, rather than thermal coal used for burning in power stations.

Ms Palaszczuk said the approval for the Olive Downs mine, which will deliver 500 construction jobs and employ 1000 workers when it opens in 2022, was part of \$21 billion in new resources investment in Queensland and 8000 new jobs over the past five years.

"My government is delivering our plan for Queensland's economic recovery and the resources sector will continue to be an important part of that plan," she said. "The resources industry has a long future in Queensland, whether it's metallurgical coal from the Bowen Basin, bauxite from Weipa or rare earth minerals from the North West Minerals Province."

Ms Palaszczuk – who visited Stanmore's Isaac Plains mine on a tour of the Bowen Basin yesterday – said Labor was backing the mining sector, which creates jobs. "We have one job and that's to ensure

Queenslanders have jobs," she said.

Ms Palaszczuk stressed the distinction between thermal coal and coking coal, saying metallurgical coal was the only way to make steel, which was "going to be around for a long time to come".

Pembroke chief executive Barry Tudor said the greenfields open-cut coal mine was expected to deliver \$5.5 billion in royalties for the Queensland government over the 79-year life of the mine.

Mr Tudor said they would be backing workers living in local communities near Moranbah.

Queensland Resources Council chief executive Ian Macfarlane said the Olive Downs mining lease approval was a "critical jobs booster".

"These jobs will come just when Queensland needs them the most, with the state's unemployment forecast to increase to 9 per cent due to COVID-19," he said.

The resources sector has been one of the shining lights of the Queensland economy during the coronavirus, with mining companies implementing strict COVID-19 plans to ensure production was not affected by the global pandemic.

Unlike the tourism industry, which has been smashed by border closures, mining and agriculture have had a strong year and helped fill state coffers ahead of the October 31 poll.

Treasurer Cameron Dick said coal mining would play a central part in the state's economic recovery from the coronavirus, with the Olive Downs mine expected to contribute \$8 billion to the local economy and more than \$10 billion to the state's economy over the next eight decades.

Mr Dick once again claimed Queensland's economy was stronger because of its closed borders.

Federal Resources Minister Keith Pitt welcomed the new mining lease but said it was no surprise the announcement was made just before the state election.

He doubted Central Queensland locals would be "tricked into believing that Labor has suddenly seen the light on the resources sector".

"Regional Queenslanders who work in the resources sector have had years of Labor disparaging the sector and its workers, as well as years of Labor pronouncing the death of coal and death of coal mining jobs," Mr Pitt said.