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Senator for Queensland

SENATOR ANDREW BRAGG

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Shadow Minister for Resources

SENATOR ROSS CADELL

Senator for New South Wales

TOM VENNING MP

Member for Grey

16 September 2026

Coalition will change the law to help Tomago/Whyalla/Boyne and bring back the manufacture of structural steel

The Coalition will introduce legislation to help both the Whyalla steelworks blast furnace and bring back the manufacture of structural steel, as well as help the Tomago aluminium smelter and Queensland's Boyne aluminium smelter, by fast-tracking critical energy projects and reversing Labor's changes that hold back critical projects.

The Environment and Other Legislation Amendment (Fast Tracking Coal, Gas and Oil Projects) Bill 2026 will restore a fast-track approvals pathway for projects deemed of critical sovereign or national significance, including the Whyalla steelworks and Tomago and Boyne aluminium smelters, plus oil, coal and gas projects.

Federal Member for Grey Tom Venning said the Bill would help ensure projects critical to Australia's sovereignty and national security, including the Whyalla steelworks and Port Pirie multi-metals smelter, can secure the investment and approvals needed to get off the ground.

"This will be an important step towards ensuring projects like Whyalla have a pathway to secure the energy and investment they need to keep manufacturing in Australia," Mr Venning said.

"The blast furnace is off, hundreds of workers are facing redundancy, and Australia has lost a critical piece of its manufacturing capability. The government needs to stop chasing

headlines and start fixing the fundamentals. That means reliable and affordable energy, less red tape, investment and a policy environment where Australian manufacturing can actually compete.”

Leader of The Nationals Matt Canavan said the Bill focuses on protecting Australia’s ability to make its own products such as buildings, rails and bridges, by unlocking our domestic oil, coal and gas.

“This Bill is absolutely crucial to ensure Australia can have its own domestic energy resources, and our own capability to actually build and create our own products,” Senator Canavan said.

“The laws are shutting down industry, while sending families broke. As it stands, Export Finance Australia can’t help save a blast furnace or an aluminium smelter and under the current restrictions, Australia couldn’t rebuild its steel making capability.

“Closing the Whyalla steelworks blast furnace – which was the last millwork to produce structural steel - means we can’t make steel to make buildings, bridges or railway lines. We would have to import all of it. It’s not just a practical or productivity issue, it’s now a national security issue.

“Given we are the world’s largest exporter of iron ore and coking coal, it is an indictment on Australian energy and industry and our national security that we have lost the last blast furnace in this country to make structural steel.”

Shadow Minister for the Environment Andrew Bragg said Labor has systematically embedded discrimination against Australian gas, oil and coal across Commonwealth laws and programs, making investment harder at precisely the time Australia needs new supply.

“Labor has done all it could to suppress the supply of oil over recent years, and now we are in an oil supply crisis,” Senator Bragg said.

“It is clear environmental laws, particularly the EPBC, have piled on costs and red tape while holding back our resilience as a nation because energy developments do not get approved or are delayed forever.

“At its core, Australia does not lack energy resources; it lacks a government with the policy courage to develop them, and a government responsible for the closure of the Whyalla steelworks blast furnace.

“Environment Minister Murray Watt claimed that Labor fixed environmental laws for business. The reality is that the primary legislation was gutted, creating more uncertainty than ever and is now shutting down our steel industry.

“At the most basic level, federal environmental laws must protect our natural environment, but they must also promote the fundamental national security and economic interests of the Australian people. The changes in this Bill will ensure there is a fast-track approvals pathway for projects that are deemed of critical sovereign or national significance, meaning that the usual environmental standards would not apply.”

Shadow Minister for Resources Susan McDonald said in a political backroom deal struck with Labor and the Greens - oil, gas, and coal ventures were explicitly banned from accessing fast-track approval processes, priority class declarations, and national interest pathways.

“We’ve had the Prime Minister go cap in hand and begging for fuel,” Senator McDonald said.

“That deal was an act of economic self-harm. It undermined Australia’s energy security by design. There was little or no analysis of the economic, energy and broader impacts of this deal. We should want Australian oil as much as we want Australian critical minerals or Australian renewable energy. We need all forms of energy.”

Nationals Senator for New South Wales Ross Cadell said large swathes of regional Australia faced economic bedlam should Labor and The Greens continue to block critical projects that would otherwise create jobs and prosperity in the regions.

“Rather than spending billions of taxpayer dollars to bail out industries melting under the pressure of ill-thought-out environmental laws and sky-high energy prices it is time we put Australia first,” Senator Cadell said.

“Each and every time that a project approval is delayed, communities in regional Australia are left in limbo about their future. The Coalition’s approach will ensure Australia maintains its sovereign capability and keeps regional Australia thriving.”

Nearly 40 gas and oil projects sit bogged down in EPBC bureaucracy. Around 90 renewable energy developments are similarly trapped in administrative gridlock, and some 80,000 houses are also stuck in this quagmire. The Bill amends the EPBC Act to remove explicit statutory bans targeting fossil fuel actions by:

- Reopening streamlined environmental assessment pathways for resource projects.
- Removing the restriction preventing the Minister from making exclusion determinations in respect of fossil fuel actions.
- Restoring the Minister’s capacity to declare a fossil fuel project a national interest proposal.
- Allowing fossil fuel actions to be included in priority classes of actions for bioregional development zones, enabling the Minister to grant exemptions for fossil fuel actions in conservation zones, and allowing the Minister to declare a fossil fuel project as a priority action for national interest proposals that override bioregional plans.
- Repealing the standalone definition of “fossil fuel action” from the EPBC Act, ensuring all energy and infrastructure developments are assessed against standard, objective criteria.

The Bill also repeals blanket prohibitions across key Commonwealth agencies, restoring access to commercial financing, export support and research co-funding.