

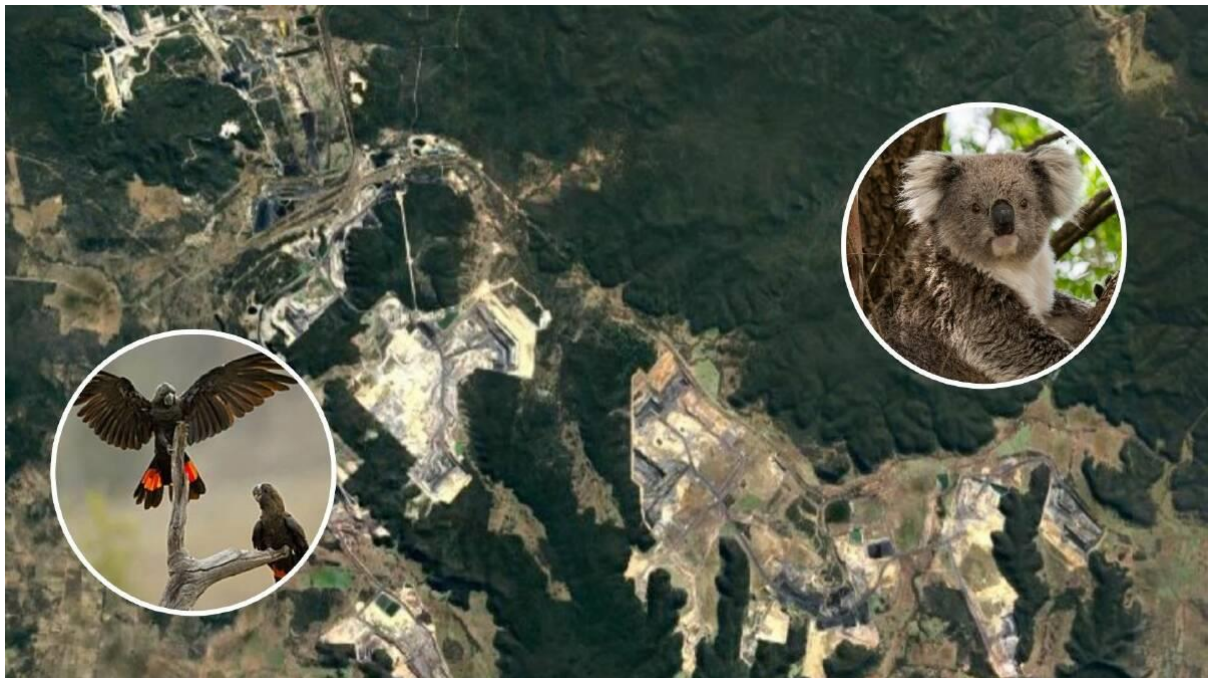
## 'Bad reputation': coal mine bid to expand in koala, black cockatoo habitat

By [Saffron Howden](#)

**Updated** March 21 2025 - 6:33pm, first published 3:35pm

An additional 43 million tonnes of coal to be sent overseas and burnt for electricity would be dug up in koala, rock wallaby and glossy black cockatoo habitat under plans to extend the life of a major mine.

Glencore, the owner of the Ulan coal mining complex in Central West NSW, is seeking federal approval to extend its operations for a further six years to the end of 2041. The plan is to widen an existing Ulan west underground longwall mine from 220 to 400 metres, according to documents before federal environment authorities.



*The existing Ulan underground coal mining operation, top left, near Mudgee in Central West NSW is next door to the Wilpinjong and Moolarben open cut coal mines depicted here. Inset, a koala and a glossy black cockatoo. Pictures Google Earth, Shutterstock and Wikimedia*

Above ground, the application covers a 1743-hectare area of land north-east of Mudgee and Gulgong.

It could directly affect koalas, south-eastern black cockatoos, brush-tailed rock wallabies, painted honeyeaters, as well as other threatened bird and animal species. The expansion would directly disturb about 191 hectares of land, and Glencore says up to 35 hectares of native vegetation would be cleared.

### **Thermal coal destined for overseas**

The Ulan operation, which is already approved to extract 20 million tonnes of coal a year, provided 660 jobs for employees and contractors in 2023, while Glencore said it spent \$494 million on goods and services from 910 Australian businesses that year. In its 2024-2026 climate transition plan, Glencore also said it was "committed to a responsible phase-down of our thermal coal production".

Thermal coal, like that extracted from Ulan, is mainly burnt for electricity generation. Climate advocates have urged the federal government to reject the company's bid to expand its operation.



*A wild koala in a gum tree. Picture Shutterstock*

"To extend the Ulan coal mine would be a slap in the face for Australians who are already forced to live with the reality of a damaged climate," Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) lead environmental investigator Annica Schoo said.

"Glencore has a bad reputation for bulldozing threatened species habitat to expand its coal mine."

The company is separately applying for another expansion of its Ulan mine.

The federal government, which ushered in a legislated net zero emissions target by 2050, [approved three coal mine extensions](#) in September 2024 - two in the Hunter Valley and another in the NSW north west.

### **Jobs for mines versus renewables**

The Ulan complex sits within the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone, which is [designed to support 4.5 gigawatts of new network capacity](#) by the end of the decade and generate 5000 construction jobs at its peak.

"There seems to be a contradiction in government about where they're heading," Bev Smiles, from Mudgee District Environment Group, said.



*A file picture of Bev Smiles. Picture Mudgee Guardian*

"The ongoing expansion of the mines is just increasing the competition for the workforce for renewable energy."

Ms Smiles said there were also concerns about the ongoing impact of coal mining in the area on creeks, rivers and underground water.

"The ongoing, long-term impact on water is not being adequately predicted or managed with the current mine," she said.

Glencore was contacted for comment. It hopes to start work on the extension in May 2027. Its application under the federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* is open for public comment until April 3.

