

SE Lifestyle  
HD **THE BATTLE OVER THE BIMBLEBOX**  
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Sometimes as a journalist you report on an event or protest, and you walk away thinking, well, they've got Buckley's chance.

In the Bible, the David and Goliath yarn has an upbeat ending but, in real life, things usually tilt in favour of the big boys.

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You get a glimpse of what goes on behind the scenes – the spin, the corporate tactics that kneecap any local community or group that tries to stand in the way of a massive corporation. You know in your gut, it is wrong. You wander away knowing the little bloke is outgunned and outmanoeuvred at every turn – legally, financially, friends in high places, resources, the lot.

Yet, every once in a while, the little bloke puts up one hell of a fight. That's the story of Bimblebox Nature Refuge, an 8000ha patch of bush beauty and diversity, and the people who love it. Everyday Australians, because they love the bush and birds and nature and fairness, have been fighting with everything they're got to save it from **mining**.

Back in March 2012, I wrote about Bimblebox Nature Refuge: "Welcome to Alpha, in central Queensland, where one of the largest of dozens of mines planned is Clive Palmer's Waratah **Coal** **'China** First' thermal coalmine project in the Galilee Basin. Four underground mines, two surface mines, covering almost 700,000ha, exporting 40 **million** tonnes a year ... smack bang in the way is the Bimblebox Nature Refuge ... Apparently, under Queensland law, wide-scale **mining** of nature refuges is allowed – when it suits. When bird friend Paola Cassoni, with others, set up the Bimblebox Nature Refuge and signed the land over in 2003, they believed it would be protected forever. Forever." Wrong. Back in 2000, when Paola Cassoni, one of Australia's quietly tenacious fighters for the environment, bought Bimblebox to save it from land clearing, the Federal Government kicked in about \$300,000 for the **purchase** in recognition of its high conservation values.

So, it was too valuable to lose then, but now? Since 2012, much has happened. Clive Palmer repeatedly claimed the nature refuge was a former pastoral property that has no environmental value at all. Bimblebox actually hosts 95 per cent remnant – uncleared – native vegetation. Apart from rare endangered black-throated finches (little Poephila cincta cincta), there are 154 bird species and 12 bird species of Conservation Significance for the Desert Uplands that have been recorded by Birds Australia surveyors and scientists.

So that was just one of those little Clive facts. The sad thing is, most Australians now accept the MP might sometimes not be on nodding acquaintance with the truth. Yet, in December last year he received Federal Government approval for his monster coalmine, as Environment Minister Greg Hunt gave it the nod with 49 conditions.

Now, economic commentators are asking if any of the Galilee Basin projects are viable. It had previously not been developed because of \$10 **billion** needed to build a 500km rail link to coastal **coal** ports.

When the **coal** price crept above \$US100 a tonne in the last boom, it looked a goer. Now prices are on a roller-coaster ride as **Chinese** demand decreases. No matter, the federal and the state governments want to forge ahead. At the other end of the mega-**mining** process is the Abbot Point expansion and the highly controversial plan to dump the waste – all three **million** cubic metres of dredge spoil – into the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. It was the quickest, easiest, cheapest, dirtiest option. To put it mildly, the dredge spoil hit the fan and controversy raged, so the federal and state governments scrambled around for the next quickest fix – and are poised to fast-track the second dirtiest plan – to dump **millions** of tonnes of dredge onto significant wetlands at nearby Caley Valley, an extraordinary habitat for up to 40,000 birds including threatened shorebird species, and a fish-breeding ground that runs out to the Reef.

Hunt says: “These proposals will be assessed thoroughly.” Yet, five minutes ago he was perfectly OK with dumping it on our Reef, as was Jeff Seeney, Queensland’s Deputy Premier. Did I mention they want to change the dredging time, to start as soon as January? Yes, in the middle of a north Queensland wet season. You couldn’t make this stuff up.

Interestingly, when any ordinary mild-mannered Australian airs concerns about the environment, underground water, losing farming land or the climate, Hunt swiftly adopts certain language. He speaks of “the extreme anti-**coal** activists”, those “extreme Lefts” and the “hard Lefts”, which would be a surprise to some readers, who are all shades of politics but concerned about badly thought-out **mining** and dredging.

The argument in favour of these mega mines in Australia has now claimed the high moral ground. Hunt is following the songbook of US **coal** lobby groups, spruiking verbatim that digging **coal** out of the ground is all about “bringing (**millions** of) folk out of poverty” in India. Bless him. I got all teary hearing that. So, these mega mines are really like, you know, global humanitarian projects?

Annoyingly for Hunt, Indian environmental activist Debi Goenka, argued **coal** exported from the Galilee Basin will not lift the poorest Indians out of poverty: “The cruel reality is that (it) will not bring us light or power. Many are not connected to the electricity grid. Those who are, simply cannot afford power from Australian **coal**.” The Bimblebox battle is the story of any Australian who one morning wakes up and realises their lovely little life is about to be walked over by greed, government or the big boys. It is the story, in a nutshell, of when the mega mines came to Queensland, to Australia.

Maureen Cooper’s Bimblebox: A Nature Refuge Under Siege, will be launched at Avid Reader, West End, on November 20. noonanslastword@gmail.com

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