Adani Strong trend in poll

Voters reject subsidies for coal mine

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Just 7 per cent of voters want money from the federal government’s northern Australia investment used to prop up Adani’s giant coal mine, while nine times that number say they would prefer taxpayer cash going towards renewable energy or education infrastructure.

A new poll ReachTEL has found just 6.8 per cent of people support the idea of using public money to support coal mine projects such as the Indian mining conglomerate’s controversial Carmichael proposal, which would be Australia’s biggest coal mine.

Adani is seeking a $1 billion concessional loan from the Turnbull government’s Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility to build a railway for the mine. The application will be assessed by the fund’s independent board, but the government supports the plan.

But the new poll of nearly 2000 people – commissioned by the Australian Conservation Foundation – suggests the public wants NAIF investments made elsewhere. Even among Coalition voters there was only 10.5 per cent support for public money going into coalmine infrastructure.

The poll found nearly 83 per cent of people believe renewable energy projects should be NAIF’s top priority. Nearly 28 per cent believe there are 20 alternative proposals for jobs-rich large-scale solar plants.

There are 20 potential higher education campuses, 67 Indigenous ranger groups with no certainty of long-term funding and hundreds of locations with poor phones or internet. “Any NAIF investment in coal will come at a huge cost to Northern Australia in terms of missed opportunities for a cleaner, smarter future,” Mr Rose said.

“Public investment in Adani coal would cheat Australians in the north out of jobs in renewable energy, better education facilities and tourism.”

Respondents to the poll also showed support for strong restrictions on any NAIF lending, with 60 per cent saying they agreed the government should “only provide funding to companies that meet minimum social and environmental standards”.

The ReachTEL poll surveyed 2984 residents across Australia in late April.

ACF is one of 180 groups involved in trying to stop the $21 billion mine, which is shaping up as one of the country’s big environmental battles.

The big four banks have all ruled out funding for the mine, angering Resources Minister Matt Canavan. But Mr Turnbull has defended the potential use of the NAIF, saying the mine would create “tens of thousands” of jobs and boost state and federal budgets.

Last week, the Queensland Labor
schools and universities should be first in line for funding, with tourism and telecommunications infrastructure also attracting more support than coal.

The polling accompanies a new ACF research paper on the “opportunity cost” to northern Australia of funding the mine in Queensland’s Galilee Basin, identifying scores of other job-creating projects.

ACF economist Matt Rose says across Queensland, Western Australian and the Northern Territory government flagged it may provide Adani with a $320 million “royalty holiday” to help get the mine up and running. It has also offered it free water in the form of an unlimited water licence.

At a federal level, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten has suggested the mine should only go ahead if it stacks up environmentally and commercially – and that means no federal loan. Some federal Labor MPs do not believe the mine should go ahead at all.