



Talking Points

XX February 2026

TOPIC

Alcoa path to compliance and environmental accountability

Key points

Today I am announcing that I have granted a national-interest exemption under the national environment law to Alcoa for its mining operations at Huntly, around 100 kilometres south of Perth.

This exemption applies for 18 months and is necessary to maintain the supply of bauxite and ensure the future supply of gallium — a critical mineral essential for high-efficiency renewable energy systems, including solar panels and wind turbines.

Alcoa's joint venture with the Japanese Government — the Western Australian Gallium Project — has the potential to produce around 100 metric tonnes of gallium each year, representing approximately 10 per cent of global supply.

This exemption is clearly in the national interest. It supports a stable and diversified supply of critical minerals needed for the net-zero transformation and for defence industries, and it strengthens our strategic partnerships with the United States and Japan. It also provides legal certainty for Alcoa's ongoing operations and its 6,000-strong Australian workforce.

Alcoa has also stated that any operations covered by the exemption will be offset, and an amount of about \$4.2 million has been earmarked.

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Today I am also announcing that I have signed a strategic assessment agreement with Alcoa, which will guide sustainable mining in the Northern Jarrah Forest until 2045. This will deliver stronger protections for threatened species and ecological communities while giving long-term clarity and certainty for Alcoa's operations.



At the same time, Alcoa will address its historical land clearing through a \$55 million investment in conservation measures.

This funding will deliver permanent ecological offsets, support conservation programs for species such as the three WA black cockatoos and strengthen invasive species control in the Northern Jarrah Forest.

Strategic assessments are a key element of our broader environmental reform agenda. They streamline regulation while delivering stronger environmental outcomes by allowing the department to assess the full scope of Alcoa's operations, including cumulative impacts, under a single, comprehensive framework.

This strategic assessment brings greater environmental certainty, stronger protections for Matters of National Environmental Significance, and a clearer, more sustainable pathway for Alcoa's future operations

If asked

Does the exemption allow for further clearing of the Jarrah forest?

The Exemption has been granted to Alcoa to clear up to 1200 hectares within an 18-month period within the Northern Jarrah Forest in accordance with their existing state approvals.

Alcoa has also stated that any operations covered by the exemption will be offset, and an amount of about \$4.2 million has been earmarked.

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If asked about Compliance

How have we increased investment in compliance over time?

Our government has significantly strengthened the Commonwealth's compliance and enforcement capability to ensure strong environmental protection and rebuild trust in our regulatory systems.

Since 1 July 2022, we have delivered a major uplift in the Compliance and Enforcement Branch, expanding our triage and assessment functions and increasing specialist expertise across the regulator.

In 2025, we further strengthened this capability with the establishment of a dedicated illegal land clearing team, as well as new audit and atmosphere-and-waste teams. These teams give the regulator the tools to detect, investigate and respond to non-compliance more quickly and more effectively than ever before. This increased investment is delivering results.

With greater capacity and a more mature, intelligence-led approach, we have seen a clear rise in compliance outcomes over the past two years — including more investigations, more enforceable undertakings, stronger regulatory action, and faster responses to emerging risks.

This uplift ensures that companies operating under national environmental law are held to account, and that Australians can have confidence in the protection of our most important environmental assets.

The increased capacity and maturing approach to compliance activity has seen an increase in compliance outcomes over the last two years:

- Issuing 75 infringement notices, over seven times higher than the two years prior.
- Issuing 40 directed variations to deal with non-compliance, ten times higher than the two years prior.
- Undertaking 19 arrests relating to illegal wildlife trade, over four times higher than the two years prior.
- Issuing 112 warning letters, over four times higher than the 2 years prior.

How have the reforms strengthened compliance?



We have strengthened compliance settings through reforms that increase accountability and modernise penalty frameworks to deliver real consequences for breaches.

Reforms will give the National EPA CEO the ability to issue Environment Protection Orders, allowing compliance officers to stop environmental harm on the spot, mandate environmental and compliance audits, and enforce higher criminal and civil penalties.

These functions will transfer to the National Environmental Protection Agency on 1 July 2026.

Why has Alcoa been able to undertake land clearing activities since 2011 without penalty?

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The limitations of the current Act made resolving this long-running non-compliance complex, but these \$55 million undertakings deliver a strong and lasting resolution.

As the Huntly and Willowdale mining operations commenced prior to the implementation of the EPBC Act, Alcoa has continued operations on the presumed basis that continuous use exemptions applied, and therefore they didn't need any approval to continue operations.

This case highlights the limitations of the current regulatory framework, where protracted investigations and constrained compliance tools have made enforcement slow and complex.

Our reforms directly respond to these issues by strengthening the regulator's ability to act early, act decisively, and prevent long-running non-compliance from occurring again.

Why was no action taken to pursue Alcoa for illegal land clearing between 2011 and 2019?

The regulatory framework before 2019 involved a number of complex, longstanding approvals—many issued more than a decade earlier, where operators and regulators generally assumed 'continuous use' without the level of scrutiny we apply today.



This meant that several activities were treated as ongoing under legacy decisions, even where the underlying evidence base or environmental expectations had shifted.

These historical approvals created a complicated operating environment where it was not always clear that new assessment, intervention, or compliance action was required.

That is why from 2022 this Government moved to actively examine these legacy approvals, initiate new investigations, and strengthen compliance oversight.

We have deliberately shifted from a passive, assumptions-based approach to a proactive, evidence-driven one.

Our focus now is on identifying gaps created by historic arrangements, ensuring contemporary environmental standards are met, and taking enforcement action where appropriate.

Offer of Enforceable undertakings

To address historical land clearing, Alcoa has agreed to two Enforceable Undertakings totalling \$55 million for conservation outcomes, including:

- \$5 million to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy to develop and implement conservation programs for impacted species.
- \$6 million to Western Australia's Western Shield program to support invasive species control in the South-West and protect critical habitats.
- \$4 million to the University of Western Australia to advance research into new technologies for invasive fauna control in the Northern Jarrah Forest.
- And \$40 million to secure permanent ecological offsets, deliver a Biodiversity Management Plan, and fund independent auditing to ensure long-term environmental protection under the EPBC Act.

This approach is consistent with the department's Compliance Policy and provides timely, enforceable environmental outcomes in the public interest.

The undertakings are enforceable in the Federal Court.

Questions about how appropriate and proportionate our response is:

All measures offered by Alcoa are new and additional to existing obligations, ensuring genuine environmental benefit.



These undertakings are a proportionate and appropriate response. The \$15 million undertaking reflects the seriousness of the 2023 breach and is consistent with the maximum penalty available at the time. The \$40 million undertaking responds to a deliberate repeat breach—318 hectares cleared while under investigation—which created an offset liability of around 3,000 hectares.

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For context, previous Enforceable Undertakings under the EPBC Act have been substantially smaller—\$250,000 for Novalee Nominees in 2022 for 10 hectares of black cockatoo habitat, and \$2.05 million from Anglo Coal in 2021 for around 147 hectares of koala and other listed species habitat.

Questions regarding ongoing investigations into Alcoa:

My department is investigating ongoing land clearing at Alcoa's Willowdale mine.

I'm unable to provide further comment while the investigation is in progress.

The department is aware of the WA Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's separate investigation into Alcoa allegedly mining too close to a large jarrah tree.

The actions I am announcing today are a Commonwealth decision under national environment law. It is separate from any WA state processes or compliance actions.

We work closely with WA co-regulators to strengthen outcomes and avoid duplication.



Sensitivity

The Australian Government has announced a series of measures in response to Alcoa's non-compliant mining operations in Western Australia, including two enforceable undertakings totaling \$55 million (the largest to date). The Government has issued a national interest exemption so Alcoa can continue operations while an 18-month EPBC Act strategic assessment is undertaken to bring Alcoa into compliance.

The governments of Australia, Japan and the United States have provided financial support to the Alcoa/Sojitz gallium project in Western Australia, which, once operational, would rely on feedstock from Alcoa's bauxite mining operations.

Talking points

- The Australian Government has announced a national interest exemption under our national environment law to Alcoa for its mining operations in Western Australia *[Huntly, around 100kms south of Perth]*.
- Noting the strategic significance of the Alcoa/Sojitz gallium project, the Minister for the Environment and Water has granted the exemption for its bauxite mining operations under the national environment law to Alcoa.
- This exemption applies for 18 months and will ensure bauxite supply is maintained and future supply of gallium.
- Alcoa will address its land clearing through a \$55 million investment in conservation measures
 - these are new and addition to existing obligations, ensuring genuine environmental benefit.

Will the decision impact the gallium project's Final Investment Decision (FID)?

- The Australian Government remains committed to the Alcoa/Sojitz gallium project
 - the funding commitments through Export Finance Australia remain unchanged.

Will the decision impact the timing of the project and the ability to commence gallium production by the end of the year?

- No, we do not expect this decision will impact the timing of the project.
- The Australian Government is committed to progressing along the original timeframe.

Uncertainty about investing in a project when exemption only applies for 18 months

- In addition to the 18-month exemption, the Minister for the Environment and Water also announced a strategic assessment agreement with Alcoa, which will guide sustainable mining in the impacted area (the Northern Jarrah Forest) until 2045
 - this will deliver stronger protections for threatened species and ecological communities while giving long-term clarity and certainty for Alcoa's operations.
- Acknowledge the **s 47C** interests and investments in Alcoa
 - the Australian Government has also committed funds to the project
 - but this does not negate the need for the company to abide by relevant Australian laws and regulations.
- Australia has a world leading mining sector that underpins our economic prosperity
 - this depends on companies being compliant with the relevant requirements and operating in line with community expectations.



Australian Government

Department of Industry, Science and Resources

MB25-000793

EVENT SUMMARY **Minister for Resources**

Visit to Alcoa's Wagerup Alumina Refinery

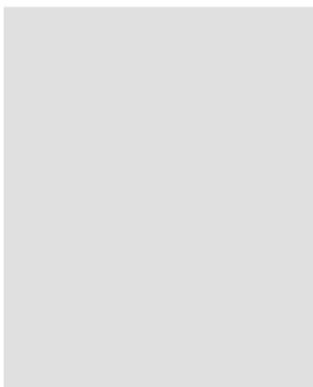
CC: Minister for Industry and Innovation; Minister for Science

Event and purpose	You will be accompanying the Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, on a site visit and tour of Alcoa Australia's Wagerup alumina refinery. Senator the Hon Tim Ayres, Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Science, and Senator Ellie Whiteaker will also be attending.
Date	Tuesday, 18 November 2025
Time	2:15pm to 2:45pm
Location	Alcoa Wagerup Alumina Refinery, 184 Willowdale Road, Wagerup WA 6215
Attendees	<p>Commonwealth delegates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP • Senator the Hon Tim Ayres, Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Science • Senator Ellie Whiteaker <p>Alcoa Australia representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elasabe Muller, Vice President of Operations and President Alcoa Australia

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Environmental sensitivities

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- The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act referral decision for Alcoa’s proposed Huntly Bauxite Mine Transition (EPBC 2024/10009) is overdue as of 30 June 2025. The Huntly project is approximately one hour away from the Waaderup facility.

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See attachments:

Attachment A: Background

Attachment B: s 22

Attachment C: Biography

Clearing Officer:	Linda Lee	General Manager Mining and Remediation Branch, Minerals & Resources Division	Ph: s 22 Mob: s 22
Contact Officer:	s 22	A/g Manager Mining and Remediation Branch	Ph: s 22
For Parliamentary Services’ use only. Date Submitted to the Minister’s office in PDMS:			10/11/2025

Attachment A**BACKGROUND**

- Alcoa's Australian operations form one of the world's largest integrated systems for bauxite mining, alumina refining, and aluminium smelting. Alcoa's Australian operations include two bauxite mines, three alumina refineries, one smelter, and two dedicated port facilities.

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Environmental Approvals - Huntly Mine expansion

- The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act referral decision for the proposed Huntly Bauxite Mine Transition (EPBC 2024/10009) is overdue as of 30 June 2025.
- The proposed action is in the northern Jarrah forest of WA and may impact the habitat of several threatened species.
- The Government is undertaking a process to deliver reforms to the EPBC Act. Reforms aim to improve national productivity through faster, more efficient and streamlined environmental approvals while delivering greater environmental protections through clear standards. Reforms also seek to drive investment, innovation and boost sustainable economic growth.

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Attachment B

TALKING POINTS

- I am optimistic about the opportunities that the net zero transformation will bring Australia's mining sector.
- To demonstrate our commitment to growing a strong and resilient resources sector, the Australian Government is investing \$22.7 billion over the next decade to build a Future Made in Australia.

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If asked: Green metals under the Future Made in Australia agenda

- The Government offers significant support to our alumina sector to help accelerate innovation and investment in decarbonisation.
- The \$5 billion Net Zero Fund – supports large industrial facilities like Wagerup to transition to lower-emission processes through technology and infrastructure upgrades.
- The \$1.7 billion Future Made in Australia Innovation Fund – with \$750M carved out to support green metals technologies backing pre-commercial innovation and deployment of renewable and low-emission solutions.
- The \$1.9 billion Powering the Regions Fund – assists industries to electrify, improve energy efficiency, and switch to cleaner fuels.

- I would be keen to hear if Alcoa has engaged with any of these opportunities to support its WA operations.
- I would also appreciate an update on the Renewable energy use for calcinators project at Pinjarra (\$8.6 million).

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If asked: Curtailment at Alcoa Kwinana Refinery

- My thoughts are always with the workers who face an uncertain future following a mine closure announcement.
- The Australian Government has comprehensive programs in place to assist workers facing job loss, and those affected by retrenchment events, such as immediate access to employment services support through Workforce Australia.

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