

Tuesday, 18 February 2014

Central Coast coal project to be reviewed by independent commission

The NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure has handed its preliminary assessment of the Wallarah 2 Coal Project to the independent Planning Assessment Commission (PAC), ahead of the PAC considering submissions from the community and at public hearings.

In January the independent PAC was requested by the Minister to review the merits of the project as a whole and hold public hearings to ensure the community continues to have a say on this project.

Planning and Infrastructure Executive Director Chris Wilson said the department's comprehensive assessment of the project, supported by independent studies, was that there were no environmental or amenity reasons that prevent the project proceeding subject to strict conditions, particularly around the protection of the area's water resources.

"Managing the impact of resource projects on our water resources is a key priority," Mr Wilson said.

"After careful consideration of all potential environmental, social and economic impacts the department is satisfied that the economic benefits of the mine can be realised without significant adverse impacts.

"The department found the company has comprehensively addressed those factors which underpinned the refusal of a separate application in 2011."

In relation to water concerns the department found:

- The project would be in accordance with the *NSW Aquifer Interference Policy* and have minimal impact on underground water tables
- The project would not adversely affect the region's water supply
- All water taken by the project could be licensed under appropriate water legislation
- There would be no significant subsidence impacts on the region's water infrastructure or major watercourses
- Any discharges from above-ground facilities would be limited under any environmental protection licence and could be adequately controlled.

Recommended consent conditions have been developed in consultation with the NSW Office of Water and a range of other state and federal agencies, and include:

- Performance measures requiring the mine to have negligible or minor impacts on all major streams, creeks and rivers
- Development of an extensive ground- and surface-water monitoring network
- A requirement for the mine's Extraction Plan to be developed in consultation with the NSW Office of Water, the Environment Protection Authority, the Office of Environment and Heritage and Fisheries NSW.

- Noise and air quality performance criteria.

A range of considerations were taken into account when finalising the assessment, including impacts on water, the environment, amenity and the local and State economy.

“The Wallarah 2 project would generate a significant number of employment opportunities in the local region, including 300 direct jobs and an estimated 500 flow-on jobs in related industries,” Mr Wilson said.

“It would also have direct economic benefits to the State, including an estimated \$134 million in taxes and \$207 million in mining royalties.”

Interested members of the public can make a submission to the PAC and/or register with the PAC to make a presentation during the public hearings, and any concerns raised during the hearings will be considered by the PAC as part of its review of the merits of the project.

Following the public hearings, the PAC will report back to the department on its findings and recommendations and this information will help the department finalise its assessment of the project in light of any issues raised at the hearing.

The PAC will ultimately make the final determination on the project, after receiving the department’s final assessment report.

More information on the project is available at www.majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au

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