Wallarah 2 Coal Project

Biophysical strategic agricultural land mapping across NSW

WHAT HAS THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED?

- The NSW Government has finalised mapping of more than one million additional hectares of the state’s most valuable farming land - known as biophysical strategic agricultural land (BSAL).
- This land has the best quality soil and water resources and plays a sustaining role in the State’s $12 billion agricultural industry.
- Following public consultation on the draft mapping in October and November 2013, the maps have been given legal effect via an amendment to the State Environmental Planning Policy (Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries) 2007 (the Mining SEPP).
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WHAT ARE THE MAPS BEING USED FOR?

• Any State significant mining or coal seam gas (CSG) proposal on BSAL will be subjected to an additional level of scrutiny via the Gateway process - an independent, upfront and scientific assessment of the land and water impacts of the proposal.
• The Gateway assessment is conducted by an independent panel of scientific experts before a development application can be lodged.

WHAT IS THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT’S ROLE IN BSAL?

• All State significant mining and CSG project decisions in NSW that could have a significant impact on a water resource will be made considering the advice of the Commonwealth’s Independent Expert Scientific Committee.
Clause 7.4 Drinking Water Catchments

(1) The objective of this clause is to protect drinking water catchments by minimising the adverse impacts of development on the quality and quantity of water entering drinking water storages.

(2) This clause applies to land identified as “Drinking Water Catchment” on the Drinking Water Catchment Map.

(3) Before determining a development application for development on land to which this clause applies, the consent authority must consider the following:

(a) whether or not the development is likely to have any adverse impact on the quality and quantity of water entering the drinking water storage, having regard to the following:

(i) the distance between the development and any waterway that feeds into the drinking water storage,
(ii) the on-site use, storage and disposal of any chemicals on the land,
(iii) the treatment, storage and disposal of waste water and solid waste generated or used by the development,
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Principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development

• The precautionary principle
• Intergenerational equity
• Conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity
• Improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms.

The precautionary principle is particularly relevant:

*If there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.*
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Subsidence

- Director General’s requirements emphasised need for accurate predictions of subsidence and detailed assessment of its environmental impacts.

- Primary subsidence model could not be fully calibrated with data from the Newcastle Coalfield.

- Second model, based on Southern Coalfield, used to calibrate model for Wallarah 2 mine.

- EIS proposes to use data from the first stage of Wallarah 2 to recalibrate model.

- Department proposes that its conditions of consent would be based on an “adaptive management approach.”

- This approach is not consistent with the precautionary principle.
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Groundwater and surface water

- Groundwater impacts are dependent on severity of subsidence impacts.
- Questionable accuracy of subsidence modelling means that groundwater modelling is doubtful.
- There is no sensitivity analysis of the groundwater modelling.
- As mining moves westwards in later stages, the subsidence impacts will be greater due to longwalls being wider and higher than early stages.
- Groundwater and surface water impacts will increase as the subsidence impacts increase in later stages.
- The loss of water from the Gosford-Wyong water supply system will increase at the same time as the Central Coast’s population is increasing to 400,000 people.