



COMMISSION GRANTS CONDITIONAL APPROVAL TO UNITED WAMBO COAL PROJECT

29 August 2019

The Independent Planning Commission has approved with conditions the United Wambo Coal Project in the state's Hunter Valley.

United Collieries Pty Ltd (the Applicant) had sought to integrate and expand open cut mining operations at the existing United Wambo Coal Mine and United Colliery, near Singleton, to facilitate the extraction of an additional 150-million tonnes of run-of-mine (ROM) coal over a 23-year period.

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment finalised its assessment of the \$381-million Project last November and referred the matter to the Commission for determination amid community opposition.

Commissioners Tony Pearson, Robyn Kruk AO and Dr Peter Williams were appointed to determine the applications.

The Commissioners met with the Applicant, the Department, Singleton Shire Council and the NSW Environmental Defenders Office, acting on behalf of the Hunter Environment Lobby, to discuss the Project, and carried out an inspection of the site and surrounding area.

They also held a public meeting to listen to the community's views. Key issues raised in oral and written submissions to the Commission, included:

- air quality
- biodiversity
- noise, vibration and blasting impacts
- water impacts
- final landform and rehabilitation
- health and social amenity impacts
- climate and greenhouse gas emissions
- economic and social benefits

After carefully considering all the evidence and weighing the community's views, the Commission has today (28 August 2019) determined to approve the SSD and associated modification applications – subject to conditions.

In its Statement of Reasons for Decisions, the Commission found:

- *the Site is an existing brownfield site with existing operational mining infrastructure...*

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- *noise, vibration and blasting complies with the NSW Industrial Noise Policy (INP) and Noise Policy for Industry (NPfI); appropriate mitigation and management measures are proposed through the conditions of consent; and mitigation and acquisition provisions will be applied in accordance with the Voluntary Land Acquisition and Mitigation Policy (VLAMP)...*
- *air quality complies with the relevant Approved Methods; has been the subject of an independent review by Ramboll; and the Project Environmental Protection Licence (EPL) would be based on current Approved Methods 2016...*
- *blasting impacts have been adequately assessed and would be appropriately managed*
- *scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions (GHGEs) have been adequately minimised as far as practicable and within the capacity of the Applicant to control. As identified by the Applicant, Scope 3 GHGEs would also be minimised as far as practicable, as the most likely export destinations for the Project's coal will be to countries that are a party to the Paris Agreement or that otherwise have equivalent domestic policies for reducing GHGEs. Accordingly, a proposed condition of consent is imposed to implement this. The Commission has considered GHGEs within the relevant statutory framework and notes that there is no policy framework nor are there prescriptive carbon targets for reducing GHGEs, nor mechanisms to assess the Applicant's responsibilities...*
- *land-based biodiversity offsets have been secured by the Applicant to protect high value biodiversity land in the locality; and Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) matters have been adequately addressed by the Applicant...*
- *water resources have been adequately assessed and the Commonwealth's Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Mining Development (IESC) advice has been appropriately considered and incorporated in the conditions of consent. Potential impacts are appropriately managed and mitigated, with trigger levels imposed for identifying potential adverse impacts and a Water Management Plan to manage potential impacts...*
- *final landform and rehabilitation outcomes are appropriate and the proposed two-void solution is acceptable having balanced the environmental, economic and social considerations. The final land use strategy would be prepared in consultation with Council...*
- *up to 20% of biodiversity offsetting requirements may be provided on site utilising ecological mine rehabilitation...*
- *should the Applicant elect to satisfy part of its required biodiversity offsets using ecological mine rehabilitation, a Conservation Bond would provide the financial assurance to ensure this is successfully achieved...*
- *visual impacts are relatively minor overall and are adequately addressed through the proposed mitigation measures ...*
- *social and economic impacts have been adequately assessed and peer reviewed by the Centre for International Economics (CIE), which found the cost-benefit analysis (CBA) to be generally consistent with relevant policy guidelines. The Project would generate significant economic and social benefits as a result of employment opportunities and revenue to the State. A Voluntary Planning Agreement (VPA) would be entered into by the Applicant and Council which would provide further benefits locally...*

- *the transition to a joint venture is appropriate and a comprehensive plan has been proposed that provides clarity and accountability in the transitional phase. The proposed approach to phasing and preparation and approval of management plans is appropriate...*
- *the Applicant has adequately addressed the recommendations in the Independent Planning Commission's (IPC) Review Report*
- *predicted impacts of the Project have been appropriately assessed and minimised through the application of suitable mitigation, management measures and conditions of consent...*
- *the Project is in the public interest..."*

The Commission noted the conditions of approval are designed to prevent, minimise and/or offset adverse social and environmental impacts; set standards and performance measures for acceptable environmental performance; require regular monitoring and reporting; and provide for the ongoing environmental management of the development.

The Commission's Statement of Reasons for Decision can be read in full here:

<https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/projects/2018/11/united-wambo-open-cut-coal-mine-project-ssd-7142>

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