



HUME COAL REPORT IDENTIFIES KEY ISSUES REQUIRING FURTHER ASSESSMENT

27 May 2019

The state's Independent Planning Commission has identified key environmental and social issues that need to be resolved before a final decision can be made on a major coal mine proposed for the Southern Highlands.

Hume Coal is seeking planning approval to construct and operate a large underground mine on a 5051-hectare 'greenfield' site near Berrima, in the Southern Highlands, approximately 100km southwest of Sydney.

The mine would produce 50-million tonnes of 'run-of-mine' coal over 23 years – new and upgraded rail infrastructure facilitating the transportation of coal by train to Port Kembla.

The Minister for Planning asked the Commission to conduct a Public Hearing into the carrying out of the Hume Coal Project and the associated Berrima Rail Project.

Commissioners Chris Fell AM (Panel Chair), George Gates, Geoff Sharrock and Annelise Tuor were appointed to review both State Significant Development applications, which the Department of Planning & Environment in its Preliminary Assessment Report concluded were not in the public interest and should not be approved.

They met with the Applicant, Department and Coal Free Southern Highlands and hosted a two-day public hearing at Moss Vale in February to listen to the community's concerns.

Issues raised by the community at the Public Hearing and in written submissions to the Commission included impacts on groundwater and surface water, air quality impacts, noise impacts, impacts on visual amenity, loss of property value and impacts on the significance of heritage items and the cultural landscape of the area.

After thoroughly examining the evidence and carefully considering the community's views, the Commission has today (Monday 27 May 2019) released a report responding to the Minister's request.

The Commission's Report makes a series of findings and 30 recommendations seeking further information from both the Applicant and the Department, prior to determination.

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“Having considered the information presently available, the views expressed at the public hearing and the submissions it has received, the Commission finds that it is not presently able to adopt a definitive position on the merit of the Projects as a whole,” the Commission stated.

“The provision of additional information as recommended in this report and further expert consideration, is required to determine whether or not the project has merit as an innovative approach to the mining of metallurgical coal with acceptable environmental impact.”

It added that the proposed location of the mine and community concerns about potential impacts would require close attention in the next stage of the assessment process.

“The local environment is recognised for its historic and aesthetic appeal, tourism and agriculture. It contains an important aquifer, with numerous bores, and is within the Sydney water catchment. These aspects tend against the suitability of the site,” the Commission noted.

“However, the site is also in proximity to an industrial area, and has an important coal resource that, with the Berrima Rail Project, would be easily accessible to Port Kembla for distribution. These aspects tend towards the suitability of the site. The Commission finds that there are a number of issues to be resolved before making any final decision about suitability of the site.”

The Commission identified 14 key environment and social issues that it cannot currently make a finding on with regard to the merits of the Project based on the material currently before it:

- Mining Method and Safety
- Groundwater
- Surface water
- Underground Emplacement
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Visual Impacts
- Historic Heritage
- Agriculture
- Biodiversity
- Economic
- Social Impact
- Suitability of the Site
- Statutory Environmental Planning Instruments, and
- Public Interest

“The Commission considers that if its recommendations are followed there will be a sounder basis for the ultimate decision on whether or not to approve the Project,” it concluded.

The Project now returns to the Department for a final assessment. It will come back to the Commission in due course for determination.

The Commission’s full report is available here:

<https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/projects/2018/12/hume-coal-project-and-berrima-rail-project>