



CHANGES TO MOOLARBEN COAL MINE GRANTED CONDITIONAL APPROVAL

19 June 2019

A coal mine in the state's Central West has received conditional approval to increase production rates and modify surface infrastructure, including construction of a new water treatment facility.

Under its existing development approvals, Moolarben Coal can extract 20 million tonnes of run-of-mine (ROM) coal from its open cut operations, 40km northeast of Mudgee, annually until 2038.

The company has lodged two modification applications to extend the boundaries of two open cut pits and produce an additional three million tonnes of ROM coal each year. It also wants to increase the existing coal processing, handling and transportation limits.

The proposed changes also include:

- installation of a reverse-osmosis water treatment facility and associated infrastructure to reduce the salinity of discharged water, and
- minor changes to surface infrastructure that include:
 - the realignment, straightening and widening of an approved haul road
 - increased product coal and construction material stockpiles
 - an upgrade to the rail load-out infrastructure to handle the additional coal produced, and
 - the relocation of the existing licensed discharge point and an increase to the volume of allowable water discharges

The Department of Planning & Environment referred the matter to the Commission for determination after receiving more than 25 public objections.

Commissioners Gordon Kirkby (Panel Chair) and Chris Fell AM were appointed to determine the application.

They met with the Applicant, Department and Mid-Western Regional Council and held a public meeting in Mudgee in April to listen to the community's views.

Speakers at the public meeting raised concerns about the groundwater modelling undertaken as part of the assessment, salinity impacts on the Goulburn River and Hunter River, and greenhouse gas emissions.

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Having carefully considered all the evidence and weighing the community's views, the Commission has today (Wednesday 19 June 2019) determined both modification applications should be approved, subject to conditions, because:

- the increase in greenhouse gas emissions is acceptable
- the electrical conductivity (salinity) impacts resulting from the Modifications are acceptable, subject to the Proponent adhering to the conditions of consent
- the potential brine impacts to surface and groundwater quality as a result of the Modifications are acceptable
- the Modifications are not inconsistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development, and
- the Modifications are in the public interest.

It has found the modifications are, "on balance", in the public interest because they would have:

- operational efficiencies that would allow for an increase in the amount of coal mined at the site by three million tonnes with relatively minor vegetation clearing, and without changing the existing mine fleet or increase the workforce
- management of water, including treatment to reduce salinity below approved levels and improved control of the discharges
- a requirement for a water study to be undertaken by an independent scientific organisation and consistent with the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council Guideline to determine the long-term salinity electrical conductivity limit for discharges from the Moolarben Coal Mine, and
- a requirement for the preparation of a Brine Management Plan, in consultation with the Environment Protection Authority.

In its Statement of Reasons for Decision, the Commission noted the conditions of consent "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/2019/02/moolarben-coal-mine-stage-1-and-2-modifications>

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