



ASH DAM EXTENSION SIGNED-OFF BY INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION

23 December 2019

The state's Independent Planning Commission has signed-off on an expansion of an ash storage dam at a Lake Macquarie power station.

Origin Energy Pty Ltd (the Applicant) has sought to modify the ash deposition strategy for its Eraring Power Station, on the western shore of Lake Macquarie.

Under the proposed changes, a new western emplacement area would be constructed within the ash dam's existing operational footprint – providing an estimated additional five million cubic metres of ash storage capacity, extending the operational life of the dam to approximately 2024. This will support the ongoing operation of the Eraring Power Station, which accounts for 25% of New South Wales' power requirements.

The stormwater system and other ancillary infrastructure would also be upgraded.

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment finalised its whole-of-government assessment in October this year but referred the modification application to the Commission for determination because the Applicant had made a reportable political donations disclosure.

Commissioners Peter Duncan (Panel chair) and Alice Clark were appointed to consider the matter and make a final decision. They met with the Applicant, Department and Lake Macquarie Council to discuss the proposed changes to the ash storage dam and undertook a site inspection.

The Commission also received 127 written comments from individuals and groups in relation to the modification application. Key issues raised included air quality and associated human health impacts, groundwater and surface water impacts, biodiversity and rehabilitation, the beneficial reuse of ash and public safety concerns about the stability of existing dam structures on the site.

After carefully considering the evidence and weighing the community's views, the Commission has today (Monday 23 December 2019) determined to approve the modification application to augment the ash dam, placement strategy and landform design to increase its storage capacity, subject to conditions, finding (in summary):

- mine subsidence as a result of the Awaba Colliery workings and potential connectivity with groundwater has been examined, and mine void filling technologies have been proposed and independently reviewed to minimise impacts to groundwater. A condition for independent verification of the mine void remediation works program has been included.

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- surface water impacts have been appropriately assessed and surface water improvements proposed
- geotechnical investigations have indicated that filling voids is considered feasible to mitigate groundwater seepage and abate subsidence in the area
- ash reuse and rehabilitation has increased recently but conditions will be strengthened to require the Applicant to achieve its goal of 80% reuse by 2021 to ensure impacts are appropriately managed and mitigated
- a rehabilitation management plan for the Ash Dam is required to be submitted within three years
- air quality impacts have been appropriately assessed; however, the Applicant will be required to update its air quality management plan to ensure impacts are appropriately managed and mitigated
- biodiversity impacts have been appropriately assessed, offsets have been quantified and an offset strategy identified to retire the necessary biodiversity offsets for the Modification Application through land purchase or Biodiversity Offset Fund contributions
- cultural heritage investigations have been undertaken; however, the Applicant has committed to undertaking further consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders and develop an Aboriginal heritage management plan. Conditions of consent have also been included to ensure impacts are appropriately managed
- climate change impacts, historic heritage, noise and construction traffic impacts have been adequately assessed and appropriately managed
- a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) is required. Conditions of consent have been included requiring the Applicant to develop a CCC, as per the CCC Guidelines, and hold regular community consultation meetings in order to facilitate information sharing and flow of environmental monitoring data to community and stakeholder groups
- the conditions for consent provide for the Applicant to surrender their Concept Approval. The conditions of consent require the Applicant to retain responsibility for all previously approved impacts which are not yet complete, and
- predicted impacts of the Modification Application have been appropriately assessed and minimised through the application of suitable mitigation, management measures and conditions of consent.

The Commission concluded the ash dam expansion is in the public interest and should be approved but imposed conditions, 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 full Statement of Reasons for Decision is available here:

<https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/projects/2019/10/eraring-power-station-ash-dam-expansion-mod-1>

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