



Professor Mary O'Kane AC
Chair - Independent Planning Commission
Via email: mary.okane@ipcn.nsw.gov.au

14 September 2020

Dear Professor O'Kane

Revised Russell Vale Underground Expansion Project (MP09_0013)

The Department has completed its assessment of the merits of the Revised Russell Vale Expansion Project (MP09_0013). The application is referred to the Independent Planning Commission for determination as there were more than 50 public submissions to the proposal.

The Minister for Planning and Public Spaces has also requested the Commission to hold a public hearing into the carrying out of the project and make a determination of the development application within 12 weeks of receiving the Department's assessment report, unless the Planning Secretary agrees otherwise.

Two public hearings have previously been held by the Planning Assessment Commission on this project in 2015 and 2016 with the Commission concluding after the second review that the social and economic benefits of the amended project were most likely outweighed by the magnitude of impacts to the environment.

In July 2019, in response to the Commission's second review Wollongong Coal Limited (WCL) lodged a Revised Preferred Project Report (RPPR) with further major changes to the project to reduce impacts, particularly an amended mine plan which no longer involves longwall mining.

The Revised Russell Vale Underground Expansion Project (Revised UEP) now involves mining by means of non-caving bord and pillar mining technique only, with workings designed to be long term stable with minimal subsidence impacts. It is proposed to extract up to 3.7 million tonnes (Mt) of run-of-mine (ROM) coal over 5 years. WCL is also proposing to redesign, upgrade and continue to use its existing surface facilities site.

The Department publicly exhibited the RPPR in August 2019 and received 202 submissions from the community and special interest groups, of which 78 supported and 124 objected to the Revised UEP.

Based on a detailed assessment, the Department and relevant government agencies consider that the Revised UEP bord and pillar mining method has addressed key issues raised by the Commission, particularly in relation to the uncertainty associated with subsidence and groundwater impacts.

The Department has recommended conditions to address the residual impacts and risks of the Revised UEP in consultation with government agencies and Wollongong City Council (WCC).

Overall, the Department considers that the benefits of the Revised UEP outweigh its residual costs and that the project is approvable, subject to the strict conditions of consent.

I have attached a copy of the Department's assessment report and recommended conditions of consent for the Commission's consideration.

If you have any questions or wish to arrange a briefing, please contact Mike Young on 8217 2091 or by email at mike.young@planning.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Marcus Ray
Group Deputy Secretary
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