

Independent Planning Commission Review United Wambo Open Cut Coal Project

The Independent Planning Commission has completed its review into the United Wambo Open Cut Coal Project in accordance with the Minister's terms of reference dated 28 November 2017. The Commission's findings and recommendations are outlined in its review report published today. The project has been returned to the Department of Planning and Environment to allow the assessment process to continue.

The Commission's review finds that more work needs to be done by both the applicant and the Department to allow the assessment process to be completed and before any determination of the proposed project could be considered. The report contains a number of important recommendations designed to inform and strengthen the final assessment.

It is important to note that the role of a Commission review is not to determine if a project should or should not be approved. The role of a review is to consider the information and assessment provided to date, consider the views of the community and provide findings and recommendations that will need to be considered and factored into the ongoing assessment process.

The community has expressed concerns in relation to the impacts of this project and the broader impacts from the continuing expansion of mining in the Hunter Valley. The key concerns relate to matters including biodiversity impacts, final landform and rehabilitation, water resources, noise, air quality, cumulative impacts, ecologically sustainable development principles and the compliance history of existing operations. The Commission acknowledges these issues as being important and in some cases further information or clarification has been sought from the applicant. The next stage of the assessment process must ensure all relevant issues are carefully and adequately considered by the applicant and the Department prior to completion of the final assessment.

The Commission's finding is that the project has merit, but only if it can satisfactorily and genuinely address the various recommendations contained within the review report. The Commission notes that its view may change on any determination decision, including because of the provision of additional information in response to this review, information provided to the Commission independently of this review, additional matters raised in undertaking its final assessment of the project, or other relevant factors.

In completing this review, the Commission considered carefully the Minister's terms of reference, the objects of the EP&A Act 1979, the concerns raised by the community in written submissions and at the public hearing conducted at the Singleton Civic Centre on 8 February 2018, advice from relevant government agencies and the Department of Planning and Environment's preliminary assessment report.