

Thursday, 2 December, 2010

Best practice dust management for Hunter Valley coal mine expansion

The NSW Government has approved the expansion of an Upper Hunter coal mine after a thorough assessment determined the proposal would not adversely affect Camberwell Village, which is located some 2.5km away.

The Department of Planning employed the findings from the Camberwell Cumulative Impact Review in its assessment of the Integra Coal Operations proposal.

The proposal involved two project applications for a \$65 million expansion of Integra's open cut and underground mining operations, north-west of Singleton.

The approval will allow the open-cut mining operations to continue for a further 12 years and the underground mining operations for a further 25 years, providing continued employment for some 530 workers.

The Department's assessment found that:

- Once the Ashton North open cut operation is completed in early 2011, there is expected to be a considerable decrease in noise and dust impacts on Camberwell; and
- Due to the distance of the Integra mine from Camberwell, along with prevailing winds, the mine would only make a very minor contribution to dust and noise impacts on the village.

Department of Planning Deputy Director-General Richard Pearson said the Integra expansion was the first mining project near Camberwell to be determined since the review and the approval demonstrated the significant progress being made to reduce mining impacts on the village.

The merits of Integra's two applications were considered together, along with the potential cumulative impacts, taking into account both existing and future mining proposals in the area.

Mr Pearson said the Department had worked closely with other government agencies, particularly the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW), during its assessment of both project applications and in preparing the conditions of approval.

"The Department of Planning's assessment found that the Integra project, which is 2.5km east of Camberwell Village, would make only a minimal contribution to the cumulative dust and noise impacts in the village," Mr Pearson said.

"The mine will contribute an annual average of only two to four millionths of a gram of additional PM10 dust per cubic metre in Camberwell Village, which is well within the relevant standard of 30 millionths of a gram.

“This approval sets very clear guidelines for the mine operator about managing dust and noise impacts and includes 93 conditions to manage the environmental impact of both proposals.

“The Department has imposed strict conditions on Integra’s entire mining operation, and not just the two new projects, as part of this approval. This includes things like real-time dust monitoring and weather forecasting to allow operations to be adjusted to suit the conditions.”

Earlier this year, the Department of Planning released an independent review of the cumulative impacts of mining on Camberwell Village.

The review recommended a number of measures to reduce noise and dust impacts of mining around Camberwell Village.

These measures are being implemented, including:

- The employment of three Department of Planning compliance officers based in Singleton;
- Placing two air quality monitoring stations near Singleton and Muswellbrook in December, as part of a wider air monitoring network which will include a monitoring station in Camberwell Village in the future;
- Conducting inter-agency audits of the existing dust management practices of several mines in the Hunter Valley, including the mines in close proximity to Camberwell Village; and
- Requiring mines to employ best practice dust and noise control measures – as required in the Integra approval.

The conditions for the Integra approval also include requirements for the mining company to:

- Implement a comprehensive biodiversity offset strategy that will conserve 86 hectares of land adjacent to the existing offset area north of the mine;
- Upgrade the degraded riparian corridor along Station and Glennies creeks, and rehabilitate Bettys Creek;
- Provide dust and noise minimising measures, such as double-glazing, insulation or air conditioning, for rural properties near the mine that are likely to be moderately or significantly affected by dust or noise;
- Negotiate with landowners to acquire significantly affected neighbouring properties;
- Prepare comprehensive air quality and noise management plans;
- Carry out heritage and archaeological investigations and prepare a comprehensive heritage management plan;
- Progressively rehabilitate the site;
- Monitor and report on environmental performance.

“These conditions will ensure that the mining company minimises, manages and offsets the environmental impact of the expansion,” Mr Pearson said.

The Department of Planning assessed both proposals as major projects under Part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act.

“Over the life of the two Integra mine projects, more than 100 million tonnes of coal will be extracted,” Mr Pearson said.

“This will deliver substantial economic and social benefits to the Hunter region and the rest of NSW and will inject around \$200 million directly into the region’s economy each year via wages and payments to suppliers.”

The Department of Planning is currently finalising its assessment of project applications for other mining projects in the vicinity of Camberwell Village. These are the expansion of the Ravensworth mining complex, the Ashton South East Open Cut Project and proposed modifications to the existing underground mining operations at Ashton coal mine.

The Camberwell Cumulative Impact Review will be a fundamental consideration in the assessment of all the projects.

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