Rasp mine expansion to boost Broken Hill and NSW economies

A $110 million expansion of the Rasp zinc, lead and silver mine in Broken Hill has been approved by the NSW Government supporting around 250 local jobs.

The approval allows Broken Hill Operations to re-establish mining operations on the site by extracting and processing up to 8.45 million tonnes of ore containing the three valuable minerals over a 15-year period.

The company must also implement stringent dust management controls and establish a comprehensive air quality monitoring network to ensure the ongoing amenity and health of local residents is protected.

Planning Minister Tony Kelly said the project’s approval would provide significant economic and employment benefits for Broken Hill and the State as a whole.

“The Rasp mine has been an almost continuous feature of Broken Hill since mining commenced on the site in the 1880s,” the Minister said.

“Most importantly, it has been a key plank in the city’s prosperity and its economic benefits have undoubtedly flowed throughout New South Wales.

“This approval ensures economic benefits will continue to flow, particularly for the around 250 workers who will be employed through the project’s construction and operation.

“It’s also estimated that an additional 350 jobs will be supported in the broader Broken Hill area through various support services for the mine and other economic flow-on effects.

“Both throughout and at the conclusion of mining operations, the site will also be rehabilitated to minimise dust and support continued tourist operations – another significant aspect of the Broken Hill economy.

“And in light of the area’s historic and tourism importance, the project has been designed to protect and adaptively re-use the site’s significant industrial heritage items.”

The majority of mining on the site will take place more than 200 metres below the ground.

Mr Kelly said the Department of Planning had undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the proposal, with a particular focus on air quality and human health issues.

In particular, the Department’s assessment found that:

- relevant air quality criteria can be met subject to the implementation of a suite of dust minimisation measures; and
- the project’s contribution to background lead levels in Broken Hill would be small and not significant in terms of acceptable human intake levels.
“The Department’s assessment found that, subject to the imposition of strict conditions, an appropriate balance can be struck between the economic benefits of the proposal and appropriate environmental, health and amenity safeguards.

“Importantly, the assessment found that the Rasp mine’s operation would not represent a significant factor in regard to lead levels and human health impacts.

“This is, of course, a key issue that must be front and centre of any consideration for mining approval in Broken Hill and the Department’s assessment thoroughly addressed this issue.

“And to further protect community health, the proponent will be required to implement a comprehensive and continuous air quality monitoring network, which will give up to date information on community dust levels, ensuring the mine operates within acceptable limits.

“This information must be made publicly available.”

Mr Kelly said this was one of 56 strict conditions imposed on his approval which include requirements to:

- implement extensive dust mitigation measures such as enclosure and ventilation of ore crushing areas, sealing of haulage roads and application of dust suppressants to non-developed areas of the site;
- establish a comprehensive and continuous air quality monitoring network;
- work closely with public authorities such as the Greater Western Area Health Service and Broken Hill City Council to implement exposure minimisation measures and address background lead intakes, particularly in the context of managing cumulative health impacts;
- co-operatively develop a Lead Awareness and Impact Management Strategy with these same two public authorities to disseminate information to educate local residents about measures that can be implemented to minimise lead exposure;
- contribute to the Government’s Community Blood Lead Level monitoring program;
- update the project’s human health risk assessment on a periodic basis and make it publicly available, with the first update to be required within 12 months of the commencement of operation and based on real-time monitoring data; and
- ensure the prevention of dust emissions is also a key element of the site’s rehabilitation after operations cease, to be facilitated through a formal rehabilitation management plan.

Other conditions imposed relate to noise impacts, traffic and transport management, surface water management, groundwater monitoring, heritage conservation, waste management, visual amenity and site rehabilitation.

During the project’s public exhibition, the Department of Planning received eight submissions from the public, the majority of which supported its approval.