Feedback invited to guide development of a NSW Coal and Gas Strategy

The NSW Government has released a scoping paper seeking input from the public and key stakeholder groups to guide the preparation of a NSW Coal and Gas Strategy.

Planning Minister and Taskforce Chairman Tony Tony Kelly said the paper provided an overview and invited comment on the main issues facing each of the main coal mining regions in NSW – Hunter, Gunnedah, and the Western and Southern coalfields.

Global energy demand is expected to grow by up to 60 per cent over the next 25 years. While the NSW Government is strongly supportive of promoting renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power, it is expected coal will continue to provide just under 40 per cent of this global demand.

Additionally, coal seam gas methane is expected to be an increasingly important energy source, with 30 per cent of the world’s energy to come from gas by 2030.

“This means we will need to undertake careful planning for the future of the coal mining and coal seam gas industries in NSW, due to this continuing international demand,” Mr Kelly said.

“We want to ensure that growth of the industry is not at the expense of environmental qualities, and that the coal industry is able to co-exist with other industries such as agriculture.”

The scoping paper states that most growth in the coal and coal seam gas industry is expected in the northern part of the State, particularly in the Hunter Valley, the northern part of the Western basin and the Gunnedah basin.

Mr Kelly said applications for new coal mining projects and expansions were already subjected to a thorough assessment process by the Department of Planning.

“However, given the scale of this industry, it is important that we seek public and stakeholder feedback on how to take a more strategic and holistic view of coal mining to help inform these assessments and other government action.”

Preparation of the Coal and Gas Strategy will be led by the Department of Planning, with assistance from all key government agencies including Treasury, NSW Health, the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water and Industry and Investment NSW.

A stakeholder reference group has also been established to assist in developing the strategy, comprising representatives from:

- Mining-related councils and the;
- Total Environment Centre;
- NSW Minerals Council;
- Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association;
- NSW Farmers Association;
- Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union; and
- Nature Conservation Council of NSW.
Mr Kelly said through the strategy, the NSW Government hoped to develop a range of initiatives that would provide greater certainty for stakeholders, communities, the mining industry and the environment.

The scoping paper will be on exhibition for 10 weeks from Wednesday, 2 February, 2011 until Friday, 15 April, 2011 and can be viewed on the Department’s website, www.planning.nsw.gov.au by following the links to the ‘On Exhibition’ page.

Submissions may be sent to Coal and Gas Strategy, Department of Planning, GPO Box 39, Sydney NSW 2001, or emailed to coalandgasstrategy@planning.nsw.gov.au

A public meeting to discuss the scoping paper is also planned at Gunnedah Town Hall on February 10, while regional forums will also be held in other key locations.

“The immediate step we are taking is to facilitate on-the-ground participation from the community and key stakeholders,” he said.

“The NSW Government is embarking on a series of regional forums to make sure we can identify the key local issues in regard to coal and gas mining.”