News release

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**Jobs, environment and amenity secured through mine modifications**

The NSW Department of Planning has approved the extension of two underground mining projects north-west of Singleton, helping secure employment for hundreds of workers.

The first of these approvals allows a modification to the mine layout at Ashton underground mine and the diversion of Bowmans Creek in two areas.

This will avoid a potential early termination of mining at the site and instead secure ongoing employment for 195 directly-employed staff, expected to 2024.

A further 345 short-term and indirect jobs across the region will also be supported by the modification.

It will also have an environmental benefit by ensuring that mining is not able to take place under Bowmans Creek.

The Department’s Major Project Assessments Executive Director Chris Wilson said the approval had followed a detailed assessment, which has involved working closely with State environmental and water management agencies.

The existing underground mine layout approved in 2002 allowed extraction to take place under Bowmans Creek.

Under the 2002 approval, some of the mine’s longwall panels were planned to have a very narrow width, or be located well below the surface, to reduce impacts on the creek.

However the Department’s assessment found that it would have been both technically and economically difficult to mine beneath the creek in this configuration.

“There was also potential uncertainty about how much creek subsidence and cracking of the creekbed this layout would actually cause,” Mr Wilson said.

As part of the modification, Ashton has been given approval to:

- Build a 1.7km diversion of Bowmans Creek in two areas and redesign its mine layout so that no mining happens under the creek, including the new diversions; and
• Replace three of the narrow (also known as ‘miniwall’) panels with regular longwall panels, allowing Ashton to access an additional 5.3 million tonnes of coal.

“The approved modification will allow the diverted Bowmans Creek and the longwall panels to be kept separate,” Mr Wilson said.

“This compares to the current approval which would have seen Bowmans Creek sitting across the mining panel layout. This is a positive outcome for both Bowmans Creek and Ashton’s coal production.

“The creek diversions are designed to mimic the natural river environment, to create a variety of aquatic habitats.”

Ashton was able to resolve concerns about the potential loss of groundwater from the Bowmans Creek system to the new longwall panels by committing to:

• Provide a 40 m setback between the panels and the creek alignment;
• Purchase water licences from other water users for both the mine’s operational period and after the mine closes, to compensate for any loss of groundwater into the mine; and
• Return high-quality water to Bowmans Creek during dry times when water allocations cannot be used to cover for the loss of groundwater from the system.

As an underground mine, the Ashton coal extension is not predicted to have any dust or noise impacts on Camberwell village.

The second approval allows an increase in the rate of coal production from 5 to 7 million tonnes per year and extending four longwall panels at the nearby Ravensworth underground mine.

This is not expected to result in a change to employment levels, nor the life or operating hours of the Ravensworth project.

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