**Baal Bone mine conditions updated**

The NSW Government has delivered an updated and more stringent planning approval which supports continued employment for 190 workers at the existing Baal Bone coal mine at Ben Bullen north-east of Lithgow.

The approval has been given as part of a NSW Government initiative to require historic coal mines, operating without a planning consent, to seek approval to continue operations.

The Department of Planning’s Deputy Director-General Richard Pearson said this ensures these mines have contemporary environmental controls and conditions.

The Baal Bone mine has been operating as an underground coal mine since the early 1980s but does not have a planning consent for the area where it is currently mining.

It has been relying on its mining lease under the Mining Act and the approval of a subsidence management plan to undertake mining.

Legislative changes introduced by the Government in 2005 ensured that Baal Bone, and similar mines, were required to obtain a comprehensive, modern planning approval under Part 3A of the Environmental Assessment and Planning Act (EP&A Act).

The approved project includes:

- Continued underground mining to extract up to 2.8 million tonnes of coal per year for three years;
- Continued operation of the mine’s surface infrastructure;
- Transport of coal from the mine via road and rail; and
- Rehabilitation of the mine over a period of seven years following its closure.

The new approval, issued by the Department of Planning, requires the mine to take all reasonable and feasible measures to reduce noise from surface infrastructure by two decibels by the end of 2011.

The proponent Wallerawang Colleries has also narrowed its proposed longwall panel closest to the Wolgan Escarpment, so that it is at least 145m from the cliff-edge.

This will protect the escarpment from subsidence and rockfalls and has also resulted in the sterilisation of some 256,000 tonnes of coal, worth nearly $25 million.

The Department’s assessment also found that surface water and groundwater impacts would be minor and could be appropriately managed, as would impacts on Coxs River Swamp.
Nevertheless, the conditions of approval require these impacts to be closely monitored to ensure they remain acceptable.

Mr Pearson said the decision illustrated the benefits of the Department’s assessment work, which provides an avenue to assess these historic coal mining operations.

“We’ve required some 12 coal mines across NSW which historically operated without planning consent to lodge their plans with us,” he said.

“This ensures that a rigorous investigation of all relevant environmental and amenity issues takes place before approval is granted.

“Baal Bone is the second mine in this situation to be approved and now has a unified, contemporary approval under Part 3A of the EP&A Act for all continuing operations.”

The Department of Planning’s assessment of the project had given close consideration to a number of important issues including subsidence, noise, surface water and groundwater, and air quality.

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