Response to the Newcastle Herald re Warkworth Deed of Agreement

Response given the Newcastle Herald on 7 October 2011 in response to the proposed Warkworth mine expansion near Bulga and a Deed of Agreement entered into as part of the mine’s 2003 planning consent:

The Deed of Agreement, enacted between the then Minister and Coal & Allied, was the mechanism chosen at the time to establish environmental offsets associated with the mine’s May 2003 consent.

The Deed does not, however, preclude the mining company from lodging an application to extend the mine within the offset area. Nor does it remove the Department’s responsibility to assess such an application.

As the offset area identified under the Deed sits over a substantial coal reserve, the company has proposed an alternative offset strategy as part of its current Warkworth expansion proposal.

The Department is of course aware of the existing Deed and carefully considered this issue in its recently-completed assessment of the proposal, including discussing this with the Office of Environment and Heritage.

The Department’s conclusion in this regard was that the proposed new package of environmental offsets would actually deliver a “better conservation outcome than the old offset”.

This was one of many issues considered by the Department in arriving at the decision to recommend approval.

Notwithstanding the Department’s position, the proposal is currently before the independent Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) for determination. The PAC will consider all relevant issues including environmental offsets in deciding whether to approval the proposal or not.