

Thursday, 8 March 2012

Gujarat NRE and mining at Russell Vale
Response given to Illawarra media

What is the department's position on Gujarat NRE's announcement to begin longwall mining during March?

Department of Planning and Infrastructure response:

The department received two project applications relating to Gujarat's NRE No 1 Mine in 2009 and 2010.

Approval was granted by the Government's independent Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) for the smaller of the two projects in October 2011. This approval allowed the company to build a variety of new surface infrastructure and to tunnel underground access roadways in the coal seam for the larger project.

The department received a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the larger expansion project in February 2011. Among other things, the project application sought approval for extensive longwall mining under pristine areas of the Illawarra Escarpment for the first time.

Due to the potential for significant environmental impacts, the department considered the company's draft EA very thoroughly and consulted extensively with other Government agencies.

The EA was then deemed inadequate by the department and a more comprehensive EA was sought from Gujarat in November 2011. The mine's major expansion cannot proceed until this revised EA is received, exhibited and assessed by the department, and determined by the PAC.

In the meantime, Gujarat has announced its intention to proceed with limited operations on one longwall within the footprint of the project approval granted in October 2011.

Officers from the department are working with Gujarat and other Government agencies to ensure appropriate environmental controls are in place before the limited longwall mining proposed by Gujarat commences.

2) Can you explain what "appropriate environmental controls" means and if this means the department's position has changed?

Department of Planning and Infrastructure response:

The department has considered further information from Gujarat that it may be possible to begin limited longwall mining, under legislative provisions which exempt it from requiring development consent. Gujarat is proposing longwall mining in a small area that has already been subject to longwall mining in an overlying seam.

As a minimum, the department will require an approved Subsidence Management Plan as part of appropriate environmental controls before any restricted longwall mining can begin.

Approval under the *Environment and Planning Assessment Act* will still be required before the company's proposed major expansion can proceed.