

Monday, 5 November 2012

Greater scrutiny for south-west Sydney CSG project under new assessment system

The proposed expansion of AGL's Camden Gas Project in Sydney's south-west will be assessed under the Government's new transparent State significant development (SSD) system rather than the former Part 3A system.

As part of this change, the project will also be re-exhibited for public comment and undergo a merit review by the independent Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) that will include public hearings.

The decision to transition the project into the new assessment system follows a request from AGL for the project to be assessed under the new system.

The department's Acting Director-General Richard Pearson said these new arrangements would ensure a heightened level of public scrutiny.

"This is the first major coal seam gas project to be assessed since the new SSD system was introduced and it will go through the most rigorous and transparent of processes," Mr Pearson said.

"It also follows the release of a number of other stringent measures such as the Aquifer Interference Policy as part of the Government's Strategic Regional Land Use Policy.

"The PAC public hearings will also allow local residents and others to put their views directly and in person to the independent reviewers."

The project was first exhibited in 2010 and AGL has revised its plans based on the feedback received. These revised plans will now be publicly exhibited for six weeks from **Tuesday 6 November to Tuesday 18 December 2012**.

The revised plans propose installation of gas wells at 11 locations, containing up to six well heads each – a reduction in scale from the original proposal which consisted of 12 wells.

While only 28 submissions were received during the 2010 exhibition, the decision to re-exhibit reflects the department's commitment to be open and transparent in the planning process and growing community interest in coal seam gas issues, plus the importance of allowing public feedback on the revised plans.

The PAC's review will then follow the public exhibition period, so it can also consider submissions lodged on the revised development application.

In carrying out its review, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure has directed the PAC to consider the original and revised plans, as well as submissions received on both.

The PAC will also assess the project's surface and groundwater impacts, potential impacts of any hydraulic fracturing and potential conflicts with existing and future urban development in the area and the values of the Scenic Hills area.

The PAC's review report will then inform the department's assessment of the project, with the PAC (consisting of different expert members from those undertaking the review) to make the final decision.

The Camden Gas Project, which has been operating since 2002 and currently produces around 5 per cent of the State's gas supply, comprises over 140 gas wells, low pressure gas gathering lines, the Rosalind Park Gas Plant and a high pressure gas sales pipeline.

Further information on the project and how to make a submission can be found on the department's website by visiting <http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au> then searching for the project.

Media contact: Paul Searle on (02) 9228 6295