Response to AAP regarding Port Waratah’s Terminal 4 proposal and dust management in the Hunter

The merit assessment process established for Port Waratah’s T4 proposal is one of the most rigorous and comprehensive for any project in NSW.

The environmental assessment for the project was publicly exhibited by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure between 8 March and 7 May 2012. The normal 30-day exhibition period was doubled for this project after the Minister requested additional time for members of the community to provide their feedback.

The proponent is now required to respond to the issues raised in submissions and the department is also comprehensively assessing the submissions.

The Minister has also asked the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) to conduct an independent review of the project including public hearings. In its review, the PAC is to consider issues raised in submissions as well as the merits of the project as a whole, paying particular attention to:

- Noise and air quality impacts
- Traffic impacts
- Biodiversity and contamination impacts
- Any other potentially significant impacts

The PAC has also been directed to recommend appropriate measures to avoid, minimise and/or offset these impacts.

The PAC review will take place once Port Waratah has lodged its response to submissions to ensure all relevant information is available to the review.

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure will then finalise its merit assessment of the project taking into consideration the issues raised during exhibition and the PAC’s report. Following the department’s assessment, the project will be then be determined by the independent PAC consisting of different members from those who conducted the review.

Broader dust management

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure has a compliance office in the Upper Hunter which is there specifically to investigate breaches of consent conditions by mines, including in relation to dust.

This office conducted more than 150 compliance inspections and audits and more than 100 enforcement actions on a range of issues during 2011-12.

If a mine is observed to be breaching its consent conditions by producing excessive dust, and we either observe this or receive a complaint, we will ensure it is brought into line.

The Office of Environment and Heritage has also established an air quality monitoring network throughout the Upper Hunter region to provide:

- continuous real-time monitoring of dust concentrations;
- SMS and email updates and alerts; and
- long-term information about dust concentrations to inform mine planning and management.