Conservation lands, jobs and new homes for Lower Hunter

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure has approved the rezoning of new employment lands supporting 3,600 jobs near Black Hill, west of Newcastle.

The rezoning also includes 545 hectares of new conservation land.

The employment lands will be a major boost to the Hunter economy and increase opportunities for residents to find work closer to home, said Stephen McIntyre, the Department's Deputy Director-General, Planning Strategies, Housing and Infrastructure.

Mr McIntyre said the 183 hectares of newly-rezoned employment lands at Black Hill has the potential to be used for a range of employment activities, including:

- depot and freight transport facilities
- industrial retail outlets
- timber and building supplies
- transport and truck depot
- vehicle repair station
- warehouse or distribution centres.

“This area is estimated to have the capacity to deliver up to 3,600 full-time jobs – which would support a further 9,000 indirect jobs in the wider economy,” Mr McIntyre said.

“The employment lands are ideally located near the intersection of the Sydney-Newcastle freeway and John Renshaw Drive and I am sure they will be welcomed by the community.”

Separately, the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) last week approved a concept plan for up to 3,300 homes at Minmi and another 1,562 hectares of conservation lands on an adjacent site.

The PAC approval followed earlier rezoning approval for the Minmi lands in March.

Both the Minmi and Black Hill decisions make clear the future direction of former Coal and Allied lands.

Together, these two projects will see the dedication of more than 2,000 hectares of new publicly-owned conservation lands in the Lower Hunter regional green corridor.

“These two decisions will help meet the need for housing and jobs in the Lower Hunter and, importantly, achieves this result while protecting important bushland corridors,” said Mr McIntyre.

“The decisions are a key step in realising the vision of a Lower Hunter green corridor linking the Watagans National Park with the coastal plains of Port Stephens.”

As part of the same rezoning, 545 hectares of bushland at Tank Paddock and nearby Stockrington will be permanently preserved as a State conservation area for present and future generations.
The Tank Paddock and Stockrington area contains threatened flora and fauna species including:
- the Lower Hunter Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest endangered ecological community
- Powerful Owl and Masked Owl
- Grey-headed Flying-fox
- Little Bentwing-bat

“These lands also form part of an east-west migratory pathway and provide a drought refuge for inland species,” Mr McIntyre said.

“Now that the Black Hill area is rezoned a concept plan for the development of the employment area will be assessed and determined.”

The PAC has approved a concept plan for up to 3,300 lots, commercial and retail development, new and expanded primary schools, recreation facilities and infrastructure at Minmi, after considering the department’s assessment report.

The concept plan provides further detail about how the area will grow, following the rezoning for the area in March 2013.

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