Inquiry sought a response to claims that footage taken in the Prospect Reservoir catchment showed impacts such as drying swamps, dying vegetation, cracking of creek beds, subsidence and discolouration.

RESPONSE

The department is aware of the alleged impacts outlined in your inquiry as well as concerns that have been raised by members of the community and is currently investigating the matter.

From the information you have provided, the impacts appear to be related to Area 3A of the mine plan which received approval to begin mining in 2009.

The impacts appear not to be related to Area 3B for which the department gave approval for mining to commence in February this year.

The department makes a number of general points in response to your query:

- The department’s assessments in relation to the Dendrobium mine have made it clear that, should mining be approved, some surface impacts were to be expected.

- As a result, the department’s consideration of mining in this area has always involved a careful balancing of potential economic benefits against expected environmental and other impacts.

- Our assessments have indicated throughout that no significant impacts are expected on the quantity or quality of Sydney’s drinking water supplies. This remains the department’s position.

- During the department’s 2009 planning assessment, it became clear that the most significant natural feature potentially affected within Area 3A was a very large waterfall on Sandy Creek. Conditions of approval required the company to avoid all impacts on this waterfall and, consequently, the company pulled back its proposed mine plan in this area.

- As a result, mining stopped some 400 metres short of the waterfall, sterilising a very large amount of coal. This mining has now been completed with no impacts on this significant natural feature.

- The department is not currently aware of any breaches of the mine’s conditions of approval and notes that the company has always reported surface impacts in an extremely timely manner to all relevant Government agencies.

- The department remains committed to ensuring the mine operates in line with its existing planning approvals. Any future applications will be subject to rigorous merit assessment processes and appropriate conditions of approval.

In relation to the most recent approval for Area 3B, the department makes the following points:
• The Director-General’s approval of the Subsidence Management Plan in February this year represents a significant strengthening of the mine’s regulatory regime.

• In particular, approval was only given for mining to occur in five out of ten proposed longwalls, with approval for the remaining five longwalls dependent on satisfactory environmental outcomes for the first five.

• Other details of the conditions imposed in February this year are available in our statement from the time at http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/DesktopModules/MediaCentre/getdocument.aspx?mid=1130