

# Media release



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## **Planning for Upper Hunter biodiversity and mining: have your say**

Feedback is being sought on a new initiative to provide improved biodiversity outcomes in coal mining areas in the Upper Hunter with the terms of reference for the Upper Hunter Strategic Assessment placed on public exhibition.

The NSW and Commonwealth Governments have agreed to work together to provide a region-wide response to the biodiversity impacts of coal mining proposals.

At present, coal mining companies are required to protect biodiversity areas over the long term to compensate for vegetation clearing on their mine site (in a process known as offsetting).

These decisions are being made on a case-by-case basis when individual development applications are lodged.

The Upper Hunter Strategic Assessment aims to improve biodiversity planning by creating a region-wide plan identifying which areas should be protected, to better guide decisions before the applications are lodged. This plan will be formulated with scientific facts and extensive community input.

Preparation of the strategic assessment was recommended in the Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan.

Some of the benefits of this new approach include:

- delivering upfront certainty for the community and miners;
- streamlining decisions by removing the need for a separate Commonwealth approval where the biodiversity plan is being implemented,
- improving environmental outcomes through finding and securing offsets in a more co-ordinated way,
- better addressing the cumulative impacts of future mining on biodiversity over a 25 year horizon; and
- improving the practice of ecological restoration of all land.

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities are working together to prepare the biodiversity plan.

The study area for the Strategic Assessment is some 260,000 hectares in the Upper Hunter, Muswellbrook, Singleton and Cessnock council areas.

Ten mining companies with exploration leases in the region have agreed to participate in the study: Rio Tinto, Xstrata, BHP Billiton, Anglo American, Coal and Allied, Idemitsu, NuCoal, Wambo Coal, Vale Integra Coal and Rix's Creek.

The terms of reference are on public exhibition until Friday, 5 July and can be viewed at [www.planning.nsw.gov.au/proposals](http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/proposals)

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