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**Department refers assessment of Coalpac projects to independent PAC**

The Department of Planning & Environment has referred its assessment of Coalpac’s Invincible Colliery and Cullen Valley Mine modification applications to the independent Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) for determination.

The Department recommended the projects be approved, with stringent conditions imposed to minimise any potential impacts – particularly on the area’s unique natural environment and Aboriginal heritage.

The two mining operations are expected to generate up to 80 jobs, $29 million in royalties to the NSW Government and provide a reliable and economic supply of coal to the nearby Energy Australia power stations to buffer against any retail electricity price rises.

A Department spokesperson said the applications to modify the two mines, located near Lithgow, are significantly smaller in scale to the major Coalpac Consolidation Project, which was rejected by the Department in September 2013.

“The two projects are around 150 hectares in size combined, compared to the 800 hectare proposal which we knocked back last year,” the spokesperson said.

The area has significant biodiversity and geological values, particularly due to the rock formations known as “pagodas”.

The previous Coalpac Consolidation Project, which proposed mining to within 50m of the pagodas, was rejected primarily because it was found to be incompatible with the conservation values of the broader area.

The Department has recommended conditions which would require Coalpac to maintain a buffer of around 300m between open-cut mining operations and larger rock formations in the area and a 100m buffer between the mines and smaller rock formations.

In its assessment, the Department also carefully considered the potential impact on a number of Aboriginal heritage sites, including a cave in Ben Bullen State Forest where Aboriginal rock art has recently been identified.

The spokesperson said the Department has recommended strict conditions be imposed on Coalpac, requiring the company to use blasting techniques that will not cause any damage to the site.

To prevent any risk of subsidence, the Department has also recommended that no highwall mining take place beneath the site, or within 20m on either side of the cave.

The independent PAC will make the final determination on the project, at arms’ length from Government.
Further information on the project, including the Department’s assessment report, can be found at www.majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au

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