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Independent commission to determine Cobbora Coal Project

The NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure has handed its final assessment of the Cobbora Coal Project in the State’s Central-West to the independent Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) for determination.

Cobbora Holding Company (CHC), a public trading enterprise owned by the NSW Government, is seeking approval for a new open cut coal mine near the towns of Gulgong and Dunedoo, about 60 kilometres east of Dubbo.

The mine would supply up to 220 million tonnes of thermal coal to the domestic energy market over an expected 21 year life and the NSW Government has announced its intention to sell or lease the project, if it is approved.

The PAC will make the final determination on the project, and the Commonwealth Government will also assess the proposal to ensure it complies with relevant federal environment laws.

Planning and Infrastructure Executive Director Chris Wilson said the department’s comprehensive assessment of the project found there were no environmental or social reasons that would prevent the project proceeding, subject to strict conditions.

“CHC has substantially modified its proposal to address issues raised by the community during the approvals process and the recommendations made in the PAC’s previous merit review of the project,” Mr Wilson said.

“In particular, CHC has reduced the number of operating open cut pits, which reduces the area of disturbance and potential air quality impacts.”

“The modifications have also reduced the impacts on biodiversity, including threatened flora and fauna species, responding to issues raised in public submissions.”

The department has recommended significant biodiversity offsets are implemented to further minimise potential impacts, which would include:

- Protection of a minimum of 8,827 ha of land for conservation
- $500,000 to assist the recovery of cave roosting bats and the Fuzzy Box and Grey Box woodland areas
- Trials of relocating threatened flora species
- A rehabilitation strategy for the restoration of both agricultural lands and woodlands

Mr Wilson said the project’s potential impacts on water systems have been assessed and reviewed by independent experts engaged by the PAC and the department, who had concluded that any impacts could be appropriately managed.
“A comprehensive water management plan will need to be completed prior to any mining starting at the site, with strict performance measures in place to ensure only minor or negligible impacts on local water systems,” he said.

He said the project would be in the public interest given the significant benefits to the local, regional and State economies.

“If approved, the project would create more than 1,100 construction and operational jobs in the Central-West and provide a secure supply of thermal coal for NSW power stations for decades,” he said.

“A cost benefit analysis calculated the project would have a net benefit to Australia in the order of $1.9 to 2.1 billion, including more than $400 million in royalties to the NSW Government during the mine’s lifetime.”

The department’s assessment report can be viewed at: http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/

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