Wednesday, 12 November 2014

Independent decision on Watermark proposal

The Watermark Coal Project will be referred to the independent Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) with a recommendation it be approved under strict conditions.

If approved, the project would employ around 400 people and inject more than $1.5 billion into the State’s economy.

The final assessment conducted by the Department of Planning and Environment recommended approval of the project subject to strict conditions and stringent monitoring.

The independent PAC’s review of the project found that it could be approved without significant impacts to the agricultural productivity of the Liverpool Plains.

A spokesperson for the Department said that in response to the PAC’s review the company conducted more extensive groundwater modelling, which was reviewed by an independent water expert.

“A key consideration in the Department’s assessment was the value of the Liverpool Plain – some of the most fertile and productive land in NSW,” a spokesperson said.

“The project is on higher ground above the black soil plains and extensive groundwater modelling has confirmed there would not be any significant impacts on aquifers or agricultural production.”

The Department has strengthened recommended water monitoring requirements for the project, based on the advice of the independent expert.

This includes recommendations that observation bores are set up near the mine and on the edge of the alluvial flats to monitor any unforseen impacts.

In addition recommended modelling requirements have been updated to require that predictions are reviewed and validated at least every 10 years when mining ceases as well as every three years during the mine’s operation.

Strict conditions recommended in the Department’s assessment reflect the advice of an independent groundwater expert, the NSW Office of Water, the Department of Primary Industries and detailed technical studies.
The Department also recommended a comprehensive suite of conditions around noise, blasting, air quality and biodiversity.

These conditions address issues raised by the PAC’s review of the project.

The independent PAC will now make the final decision at arms’ length from Government.

The Department’s assessment report is available at www.majorprojects.nsw.gov.au