The Department of Planning and Environment has imposed stringent noise, dust and heritage controls as part of its approval of the Vickery Coal Project near Gunnedah.

The project will employ 250 people and provide more than $400 million in revenue and contributions for the NSW community through the State Government.

“The Department balanced environmental, heritage and economic issues, as well as social considerations such as the fact many of the region’s families rely on mining for an income, and found the project is in the public interest and should be approved,” a Department spokesperson said.

The project involves extracting 135 million tonnes of coal over 30 years from an area that has been used for mining and cattle grazing in the past, taking advantage of existing facilities such as Whitehaven's coal handling and processing plant and rail infrastructure.

The Department exhibited the environmental impact statement for the project early last year and received 23 submissions from the community.

Local residents raised concerns about noise, dust, water and traffic. Aboriginal groups also raised concerns about the impacts on cultural heritage.

“We looked at these issues carefully and have imposed strict conditions so affected landowners can have the mine pay for measures to reduce impacts on their home, such as installing insulation or air-conditioning,” the spokesperson said.

“While we’re confident the conditions imposed on the mine will reduce impacts, there is a condition in the approval that will give landowners who remain affected the option of selling their property to the mine on favourable terms, if they decide to move at any point over the life of the mine.

“The Department’s assessment found that the mine would not result in any significant impacts on agriculture and water resources in the area because the mine will be located away from the highly productive black soils and underground water sources linked to the Namoi River.

The conditions imposed on the mine include a range of measures to reduce traffic impacts, including:

- building a bridge over the Kamilaroi Highway so that coal trucks would no longer need to cross the highway;
- maintenance payments to the local council for the mine to use local roads;
- a ban on coal trucks using local roads at night, which was originally proposed by the mining company.
Agreements have also been made between the mine and both Narrabri and Gunnedah councils which will see the operation pay $7.5 million to fund community services and local infrastructure.

“The mine will also have to consult with the local Aboriginal community to put together a heritage management plan to protect significant Aboriginal heritage sites near the project that have been identified by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage,” the spokesperson said.

The Department’s assessment found biodiversity impacts of the new project would be relatively minor, given much of the land has been mined and cleared for agriculture in the past.

“Conditions also require the mine to protect around 3600 hectares of suitable offset land to make up for around 470 hectares of woodland that will have to be cleared for the project,” the spokesperson said.

To view the Department’s assessment of the Vickery Coal Project visit majorprojects.nsw.gov.au.

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