Independent decision for Dubbo Zirconia Project

A proposal to mine the region’s rare earth metals has been referred to the independent Planning Assessment Commission for a final decision.

“The mine would employ around 400 full time workers during construction and another 250 when it’s operating,” a spokesperson for the Department of Planning and Environment said.

“The Department has recommended that the PAC approve the project, with strict conditions to ensure its impacts are not significant.

“Our assessment found the proposal is designed to comply with relevant air, noise and water quality criteria.

“The approval conditions include upgrading local roads and installing a barrier to reduce the amount of noise from the project that can be heard at Western Plains Zoo.

“More than 1,000 hectares of land are also required to be conserved as environmental biodiversity offsets for the region.”

If approved by the PAC, the Dubbo Zirconia Project’s economic benefits to the region would not just be limited to creating hundreds of new jobs.

“Building the mine would generate more than $1 billion of investment and spend around $50 million a year in the region, with this money flowing into local businesses,” the spokesperson said.

“It would also pay around $600,000 a year to Dubbo Council to spend on community facilities and around $12 million a year in royalties, which would be used to fund vital services such as schools, hospitals and roads.”

The spokesperson said there is potential for the project to have an impact on global rare earth metals and minerals market.

“Rare metals and earth minerals, including zirconium, europium and dysprosium, are essential for building computers, cars and medical equipment.

“Currently China dominates production of many of these valuable resources, so we believe this is not just a great opportunity for the region, but the country as a whole.”
The spokesperson said the proposal has gone through multiple stages of public consultation and expert review to ensure it is in the best interests of NSW and any impacts from building or operating the mine can be managed.

“The Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) has already reviewed the project and found it could be approved, with strict conditions around air and water quality, transporting the minerals from the mine and the long term use of the land," the spokesperson said.

“The PAC will now make the final determination on the project, taking into account the Department’s assessment and community feedback."

The project involves:

- extracting up to 19.5 million tonnes of rare metals and rare earths ore from a small open cut mine over 20 years at a rate up to 1 million tonnes of ore a year
- processing the ore on-site to produce up to 75,000 tonnes of rare metals and rare earth concentrate, which would be trucked and/or railed to Port Botany or Newcastle for export
- storing and disposing of the processing waste produced on site
- developing supporting infrastructure including a processing facility, a 30 kilometre gas supply pipeline to Dubbo and a 7.5 kilometre water supply pipeline to the Macquarie River
- progressively returning the site to a natural condition after mining is complete so the majority can be used for agriculture and conservation.

For more information about the proposal and to view the Department’s assessment, visit www.majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au

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