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HIGHER FINES, INCREASED MONITORING FOR MINES & INDUSTRY

Planning Minister Rob Stokes today announced the NSW Government’s intention to increase planning penalty notices five-fold, enabling the Department of Planning & Environment to issue the toughest on-the-spot fines in the nation.

This would allow the Department to issue $15,000 on-the-spot fines to companies who breach development consents for high impact developments including coal mines and other hazardous industries, an increase from the current maximum of $3,000.

Last year the Government increased court-imposed penalties for major breaches of planning controls to $5 million, up from the previous maximum of $1.1 million.

This will allow communities to be confident that high impact developments are following strictly enforced rules, with the Department doubling its compliance officer numbers and rolling them out to more areas of the state.

The Department’s ‘planning police’ monitor state significant developments, from mines to factories, to make sure their strict approval conditions are being followed.

The number of officers covering Greater Sydney will double, and two newly established teams are now operating in Wollongong and Queanbeyan. The compliance team based in the Hunter Valley has also increased its size, allowing greater scrutiny of the region’s coal mining industry.

Mr Stokes said noise, dust, traffic, waste management and other impacts are real concerns and approval conditions are there to ensure companies operate responsibly.

“These conditions are crucial to striking the balance between the significant benefits major projects can bring in terms of job creation and investment, and minimising the likelihood of potential impacts on communities,” Mr Stokes said.

“Compliance officers work with the community, industry and councils to investigate potential breaches of conditions and carry out enforcement where necessary.

“Information from community members is an important way we learn about issues to investigate.”

Spot checks, reviews, audits, site inspections and remote surveillance are among the many tools compliance officers have at their disposal. Enforcement can range from warning letters for minor offences, through to issuing penalty notices and in serious cases, prosecution actions.

The Department has carried out almost 700 compliance activities and 195 enforcements this financial year, but this number is expected to increase significantly with the enforcement team’s expansion.

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