Independent decision for Mt Thorley Warkworth proposals

Proposals to expand Warkworth mine and continue mining at Mt Thorley have been referred to the independent Planning Assessment Commission for a final decision.

“The applications have been put under the microscope through multiple, extensive reviews involving analysis by independent experts and community consultation,” a Department spokesperson said.

Conditions recommended to the PAC by the Department include requiring the mine to:

- strictly limit noise and dust emissions from the site and implement stringent noise and air quality monitoring programs
- complete a $30 million program to reduce the noise of mining equipment on the site by the end of 2016
- set aside almost 3,000 hectares of land for conservation, including more than 1,000 hectares next to the Goulburn River National Park
- pay $11 million to Singleton Council over the life of the project for local services and infrastructure, focusing on Bulga village and surrounds
- reduce the size of the final void left by mining and progressively rehabilitate the site to native woodland.

“We are satisfied that by strictly applying the Department’s recommended conditions, the proposals’ impacts can be managed,” the spokesperson said.

“Approving the proposals would mean ongoing employment for the mine’s 1,300 workers, as well as around $ 617 million in royalties for NSW, which would be spent on services such as hospitals, school and roads.

“Independent analysis has found that the projects would be worth $1.5 billion to NSW.

“Given the economic benefits and the fact the impacts can be managed, the Department has recommended that the PAC approve the proposals.”

The spokesperson said impacts to the nearby village of Bulga have been closely examined and the Department does not support the PAC’s initial review recommendation to relocate the village.

“Our assessment found dust and noise impacts on the village would not be significantly greater than what Bulga is already experiencing,” the spokesperson said.

“There are a small number of houses where the noise criteria may be exceeded, and so the Department has recommended that these landowners are able to seek further mitigation to their properties from the mine’s operators.”
The proposals being considered differ from the earlier proposal that was refused by the Land and Environment Court in 2013 in terms of biodiversity offsets, as well as having revised noise, social and economic impact assessments.

The Department has recently doubled the size of its monitoring and compliance enforcement teams.

“The Department takes its compliance role seriously and understands the community’s concerns about operators exceeding their conditions of approval,” the spokesperson said.

“That’s why we’ve recently hired more compliance officers to work out of our Singleton office.

“Their job is to closely monitor Hunter Valley mines to ensure they are sticking to their approval conditions.

“While the majority of mines do the right thing, compliance officers work with the community and industry to fix any issues quickly and have the power to issue orders, fines and penalty notices.”

The Warkworth proposal involves a westward expansion, increasing the amount of coal that can be mined and allowing it to operate for an additional 21 years.

The Mount Thorley proposal involves extending its operating life for 21 years so the already approved amount of coal can be mined and it can be used to support operations at Warkworth.

“The PAC will now make the final determination on the projects, taking into account the Department’s assessment and community feedback,” the spokesperson said.

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

Media contact: (02) 9228-6128