Independent PAC to decide on Cabbage Tree Road Sand Quarry proposal

A proposal to build a sand quarry in Williamtown, in the state’s Hunter region, is now before the independent Planning Assessment Commission for a final decision.

A spokesperson from the Department of Planning and Environment said it carefully considered the Cabbage Tree Road Sand Quarry proposal’s potential benefits and the public health issues raised.

“After a rigorous assessment and public consultation, we have found that the project could be approved. The independent Commission will now undertake its own assessment to determine whether the quarry plans will go ahead,” the spokesperson said.

“Williamtown Sand Syndicate proposes to extract more than three million tonnes of sand for up to fifteen years to provide the thriving infrastructure and housing construction markets across the local Hunter region and Greater Sydney with building materials.

“An estimated $16 million would be paid to Port Stephens Council, supporting its work providing local community services. Six permanent quarry jobs would also be generated for uptake by workers from the Hunter.

“Important public health and safety considerations were exhaustively and cautiously assessed, especially public feedback on local contamination from fire-fighting foam chemicals, known as PFAS, previously used at the Williamtown RAAF Base.

“This issue has been of utmost importance to our assessment. We have considered a number of specialist studies and consulted with seven other government agencies to consider any potential impact on the public from the proposed quarry.”

The spokesperson added that the Department sought early advice on the proposal from the NSW Government’s Williamtown Contamination Expert Panel.

“Our assessment findings and recommended conditions are consistent with the panel’s advice, which carefully considered any potential for the proposal to interact with waterborne PFAS contamination in the Williamtown area.

“The panel advised that the proposal presents low risk with respect to PFAS exposure or contribution to the spread of PFAS, as long as quarry operations remain above the water table.

“The Cabbage Tree Road Sand Quarry plans do not propose to interfere with the groundwater table or local surface water,” the spokesperson said.
Analysis of maximum groundwater levels since 1997 shows the water table has not reached the level of the proposed quarry. The Department’s recommended conditions restrict the quarry from interfering with the water table by regulating the quarry extraction depth.

The recommended conditions include a Maximum Extraction Depth Report, which must be prepared by the quarry before any digging takes place. The report would be regularly updated to track groundwater levels. There would be continuous monitoring of quarry operations and the water table over the life of the project to ensure distance between them is maintained.

Independent water sampling considered in the Department’s assessment also shows that bore water at the site does not currently contain any trace of PFAS.

“To make sure any evolving PFAS risks are being monitored at the proposed quarry site, we recommend a condition that would require the company to regularly test bore water for PFAS chemicals,” the spokesperson said.

“Another recommended condition requires the company to commission an independent expert to annually review all currently available information about PFAS contamination originating from the Williamtown RAAF base. The appointment of this suitably qualified expert would require approval from our Department, and the review findings would be made publicly available.”

In response to submissions from the public and government agencies, Williamtown Sand Syndicate significantly amended its proposal. The company reduced the proposed maximum rate of extraction by 70,000 tonnes per year, which is the equivalent to taking 2100 trucks off the road per annum. To improve road safety for private vehicles, an emergency avoidance lane was also added to the eastbound lane of Cabbage Tree Road.

The assessment also looked in detail at the proposal’s potential noise and traffic impacts. The Department has recommended conditions to manage these appropriately, such as acceleration and deceleration lanes on Cabbage Tree Road at the quarry’s entrance.

To read the Department’s assessment report visit the NSW Major Projects website [http://www.majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=6125]

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