

Frequently Asked Questions Biophysical strategic agricultural land mapping across NSW

WHAT HAS THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED?

- The NSW Government has finalised mapping of more than one million additional hectares of the state's most valuable farming land - known as biophysical strategic agricultural land (BSAL).
- This land has the best quality soil and water resources and plays a sustaining role in the State's \$12 billion agricultural industry.
- Following public consultation on the draft mapping in October and November 2013, the maps have been given legal effect via an amendment to the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries) 2007* (the Mining SEPP).
- Land that met the BSAL criteria has been identified in areas including the Central West, Mid and Far North Coast, Southern Highlands, Western region, South Coast and the Illawarra.

WHY HAS BIOPHYSICAL STRATEGIC AGRICULTURAL LAND BEEN MAPPED?

- Identifying and mapping this land is essential to managing competing land uses proposed for high quality agricultural land.
- In 2012, some 1.74 million hectares of BSAL was mapped in the Upper Hunter and New England North West regions. Approximately one million hectares of additional BSAL has now been mapped in the remaining areas of the state.

WHAT ARE THE MAPS BEING USED FOR?

- Any State significant mining or coal seam gas (CSG) proposal on BSAL will be subjected to an additional level of scrutiny via the Gateway process - an independent, upfront and scientific assessment of the land and water impacts of the proposal.
- The Gateway assessment is conducted by an independent panel of scientific experts before a development application can be lodged.

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- Of the 2.8 million hectares of BSAL now mapped across NSW, about 10 per cent overlays a known mining or (CSG) resource.
- In addition, a State significant mining or CSG proposal on BSAL must be referred to the Commonwealth Independent Expert Scientific Committee and the NSW Minister for Primary Industries for advice on potential water resource impacts.

HOW WAS BIOPHYSICAL STRATEGIC AGRICULTURAL LAND IDENTIFIED?

- Agricultural land across the state was assessed against specific scientific criteria - levels of soil fertility, land and soil capability classes and access to reliable water and rainfall levels.
- The assessment was conducted in consultation with key industry representatives and industry experts.
- As this land is mapped at a broad regional scale, there may be circumstances in which the maps do not fully reflect the existence of BSAL on the ground.
- A site verification process has been introduced to confirm whether a specific site does, in fact, contain BSAL, before proceeding through the Gateway process.
- It is the inherent values of the land itself, rather than the agricultural activity it supports, which determine the BSAL classification.
- A protocol for site verification has been developed and is available on the NSW Department of Planning & Infrastructure's website at: www.planning.nsw.gov.au/srlup

WHAT IS THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN BSAL?

- The NSW and the Commonwealth governments have agreed on a referral protocol under the National Partnership Agreement on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development.
- This will ensure all State significant mining and CSG project decisions in NSW that could have a significant impact on a water resource will be made considering the advice of the Commonwealth's Independent Expert Scientific Committee.
- All State significant mining and CSG projects on BSAL will be referred to the committee as part of the Gateway process.
- All other State significant projects (not on BSAL) that are likely to have a significant impact on water resources will be referred to the committee as part of the development assessment process.

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WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR STRATEGIC REGIONAL LAND USE PLANS?

- Strategic Regional Land Use Plans (SRLUPs) for the Central West, Southern Highlands and other areas of the state were initially proposed to be completed by 2015. These plans would have mapped BSAL and water resources for these regions. But this mapping has instead been completed for the entire state.
- It is now proposed that Regional Growth Plans are prepared for these areas, rather than Strategic Regional Land Use Plans (SRLUPs).
- These Regional Growth Plans will provide a comprehensive framework for managing growth and natural resources in regional areas. They will also have a strong focus on the protection of high-quality agricultural land.
- The plans will be developed with local community and stakeholder participation.

HAS FEEDBACK FROM THE PUBLIC EXHIBITION LED TO THE BSAL MAPPING BEING CHANGED?

- The mapping has not changed as a result of the public exhibition as no new issues were raised in the submissions. Furthermore, there is a process for site verification to occur before a proposal goes through the Gateway process.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- To find out more about the Strategic Regional Land Use Policy visit:

Department of Planning & Infrastructure website:

www.planning.nsw.gov.au/srlup

NSW Government Coal Seam Gas website:

www.csg.nsw.gov.au

NSW Government Strategic Regional Land Use website:

www.nsw.gov.au/strategicregionallanduse