

Coalpac Project Assessment Report



Planning &
Infrastructure

Frequently Asked Questions

October 2013

WHAT IS THE COALPAC PROJECT?

- The Coalpac consolidation project is a proposed major expansion of the Cullen Valley and Invincible coal mines.
- The proposal involves production of up to 3.5 million tonnes a year of coal for up to 21 years and associated surface infrastructure.

WHERE ARE THE PROPOSED MINING OPERATIONS LOCATED?

- The proposed mining site is located approximately 25km north-west of Lithgow, just two kilometres from the Gardens of Stone National Park which forms part of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage listing.
- The area has significant biodiversity and geological values, particularly due to its 250 million year old rock formations known as “pagodas”.
- The proposed expansion involves open cut mining as close as 50m from these pagodas.

WHAT IS THE DEPARTMENT’S RECOMMENDATION ON THE COALPAC PROJECT?

- The department has recommended against mining as proposed, because it is incompatible with the highly significant values of the proposed mine site in relation to the surrounding area.
- This followed a detailed and rigorous assessment process.
- A final decision will now be made by the independent Planning Assessment Commission (PAC), made up of different panel members to those who conducted a review of the project last year.

WHAT WERE THE CRITICAL ISSUES WHICH LED TO THE DEPARTMENT’S REFUSAL RECOMMENDATION?

- The department’s assessment found that the mining operation as currently proposed would be incompatible with the natural setting which includes unique rock formations and sensitive and important biodiversity areas.
- For example, the location of the proposed operation is just two kilometres from the Gardens of Stone National Park which forms part of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage listing.
- Within this setting, the narrow elongated nature of the mine plan would cause a significantly greater impact on the surrounding area compared to other mines of a similar size.

WHAT IMPACTS WOULD THE PROPOSED MINE HAVE ON THE PAGODA FORMATIONS?

- The pagodas are towering, exposed rock formations that are highly significant natural features of the

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surrounding landscape and estimated to be 250 million years old. The PAC found they should be subject to total protection.

- The proposed mining expansion involved open cut mining along the narrow valley floors as close as 50m from these pagoda formations.
- The department's assessment found that, while the mine would not undermine the structural integrity of the pagodas, it would carve out a significant area of the conservation area and rocky slopes which form part of their base.
- In doing so, the pagodas' setting and biodiversity, scenic and heritage values would be significantly affected.
- Even after the mine's plans were amended to reduce impacts on a number of significant pagodas, it would still cause severe impacts.

WHAT ARE ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THIS DECISION?

- The department recognises that the Coalpac project has economic benefits, including ongoing employment for 120 people.
- As a result, the assessment required a careful balancing of a number of competing factors.
- After thoroughly considering all of the relevant issues, including economic benefit to both the local area and NSW as a whole, the department concluded that these factors were in this case outweighed by the mine's environmental impacts.
- It is more appropriate to pursue alternative sources of coal which can meet thorough merit assessment considerations.

DID THE DEPARTMENT CONSIDER THE COMPANY'S AMENDED PLANS?

- Yes, the department has carefully considered all Coalpac's submissions on the project – including several amended plans.
- Department staff members have visited the Coalpac site on several occasions.
- Following the final submission of amended plans in July 2013, staff including the Director-General returned to the site for another on-the-ground assessment.
- The department acknowledges the company's efforts to scale-back its initial proposal to limit impacts on the rock pagodas in the amended plans.
- The department, however, concluded the changes did not fundamentally alter the overall environmental impacts of the project or the conclusion that the mine should not be approved.

Overall, the narrow elongated nature of the mine plan would cause a significantly greater impact on the surrounding area compared to other mines of a similar size (for instance the total perimeter of the open cut mine is 40km).

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WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION?

- The department's assessment report and recommendation can be found at: http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=4332
- The PAC's final decision will be made available at www.pac.nsw.gov.au