

ASSESSMENT REPORT

ROCGLEN COAL MINE

Highwall Stabilisation Modification (MP 06_0198 MOD 1)

1 BACKGROUND

Whitehaven Coal Mining Pty Limited (Whitehaven) has approval to operate the Rocglen Coal Mine, approximately 25 kilometres north of Gunnedah, in the Gunnedah Shire local government area (see Figure 1).

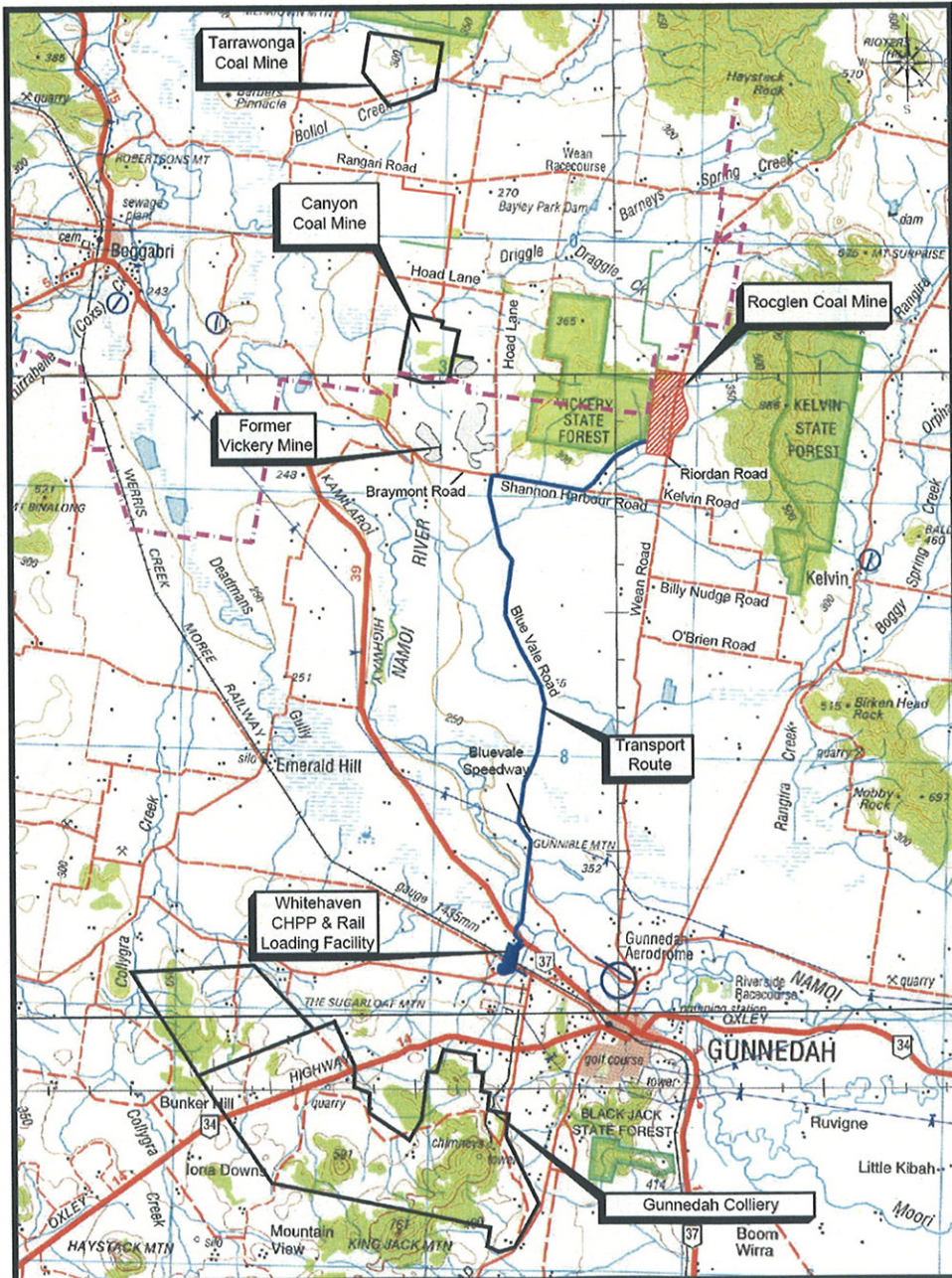


Figure 1: Location of Rocglen Coal Mine

The Rocglen Coal Mine (formerly known as the Belmont Coal Project) was approved by the Minister for Planning in April 2008. This approval (06_0198) allows Whitehaven to:

- extract up to 1.5 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa) of run-of-mine coal by open cut and auger mining methods;
- process this coal on site;
- transport the processed coal to the existing Whitehaven coal handling and preparation plant (CHPP), using both public and private haul roads (also see Figure 1); and
- rehabilitate the site.

2 PROPOSED MODIFICATION

On 21 May 2010, Whitehaven asked the Minister to modify the terms of its approval under section 75W of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act). The proposed modification involves undertaking earthworks to stabilise the eastern highwall of the open cut pit.

The Rocglen open cut pit contains a fault structure in its northeastern portion (see Figure 2). In October 2009, a number of surface cracks were identified adjacent to the pit's eastern highwall. Whitehaven's geotechnical investigations discovered the presence of a near vertical fault in the cracked areas, and an absence of competent rock between the fault and the coal seam. Significant rainfall in January 2010 then caused earth slippage around the fault structure. Following further slips on the northeastern face of the pit in April 2010, mining adjacent to the eastern highwall was stopped for safety reasons.

Whitehaven's geotechnical advice determined that to stabilise the eastern highwall it would be necessary to cut the highwall back beyond the fault zone. The current highwall should be cut back to the east and northeast. These earthworks would ensure the long term stability of the highwall and provide a safe working environment for workers in the pit.

The combined area of the two pit extensions required for stabilisation works would be 2.05 hectares (ha). Whitehaven would utilise a combination of face slopes of 45 degrees and a 15 metre bench halfway down the face to aid stability.

The additional overburden material extracted from the fault zone would be approximately 1 million bank cubic metres. Whitehaven proposes to emplace this overburden in disturbed areas north and east of the proposed stabilisation works. These areas are approved for overburden emplacement and soil stockpiling.

3 STATUTORY CONTEXT

Approval Authority

The Minister was the approval authority for the original project application, and is consequently the approval authority for this modification application. However the Director, Mining and Industry Projects, may determine the modification application under the Minister's delegation of 25 January 2010.

Modification

The proposed modification involves minor earthworks to stabilise the eastern highwall of the open-cut pit. It does not involve changing the mining or transportation components of the approved project. The Department is satisfied that the proposed modification is within the scope of section 75W of the EP&A Act.

Consultation

Under section 75W, the Department is not required to undertake consultation or exhibit the modification application. However, after accepting Whitehaven's modification application and Environmental Assessment (EA) on 21 May 2010, these documents were made publicly available on the Department's website.

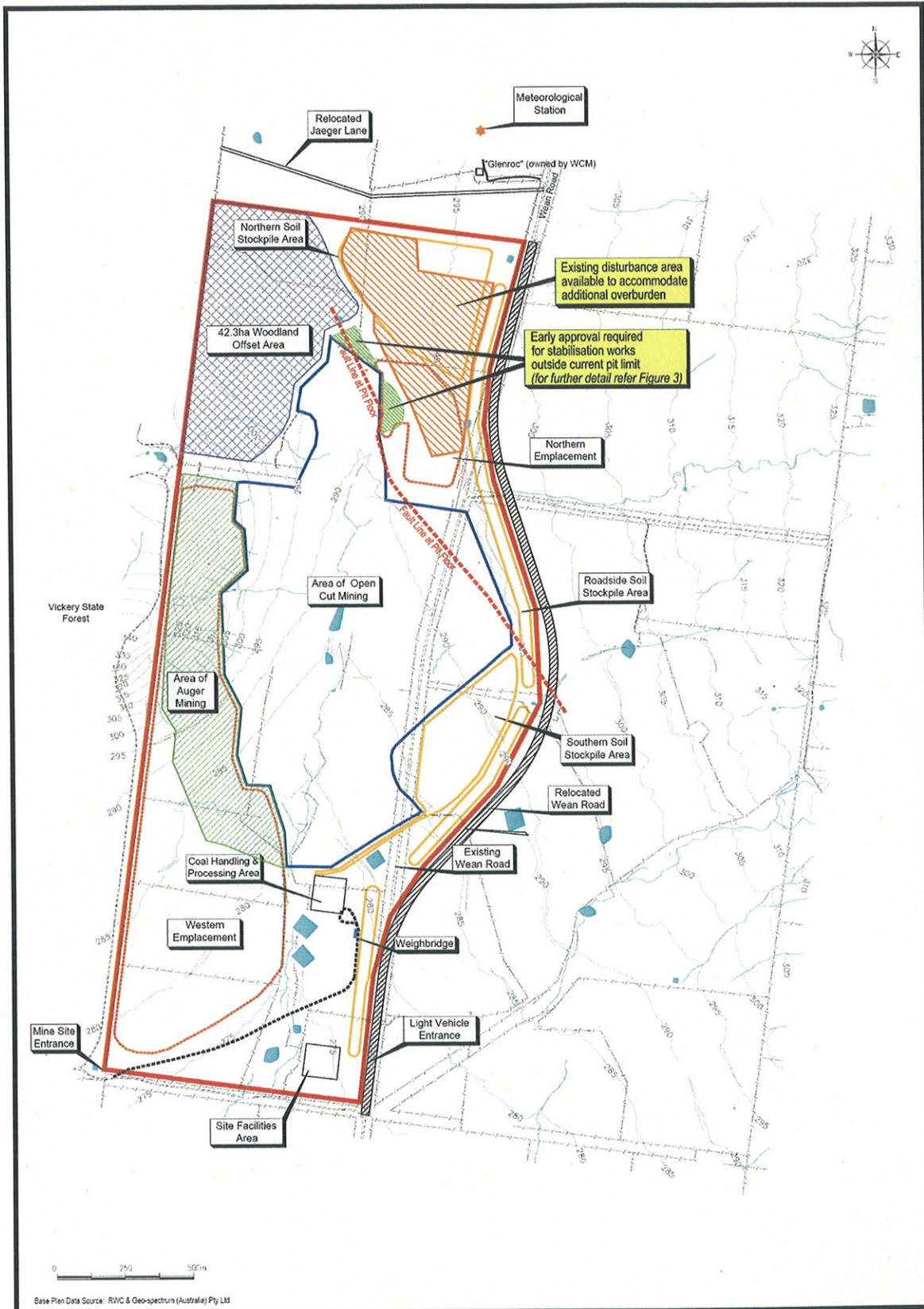


Figure 2: Rocglen Coal Mine and the proposed highwall stabilisation works

4 ASSESSMENT

The Department has assessed the key potential impacts of the proposed modification (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Assessment of key issues

Issue	Consideration
<i>Approved mining area</i>	The proposed highwall stabilisation works would increase the approved mining area. However, this increase would amount to only 2.05 ha, or 1.8% of the total pit size. The Department considers this increase to be minor.
<i>Overburden Emplacement</i>	Overburden extracted during the highwall stabilisation works would be emplaced within an existing approved emplacement and soil stockpiling area immediately north and east of the highwall. Whilst the additional material would increase the height of the emplacement area by 6 metres (m), the emplacement area would be reshaped to blend in with surrounding topography. This emplacement area would be rehabilitated on completion of mining.
<i>Flora & Fauna</i>	The proposed works would avoid impacting flora and fauna values, as the proposed extension area contains no vegetation.
<i>Water Management</i>	The proposed extension to the open-cut pit would result in a small increase in the pit catchment. Existing water management structures would continue to be used to divert run-off from the emplacement area away from the pit. The Department is satisfied that the proposed modification would have a negligible impact on water management and no additional conditions of approval need to be applied.
<i>Noise</i>	The proposed highwall stabilisation works would not cause significant noise impacts over those already assessed and approved. The mine's approval contains strict noise limits, and Whitehaven would employ its current existing management strategies, mitigation measures and monitoring to ensure noise levels remain within approved limits. The Department considers no additional conditions of approval are required.
<i>Air quality</i>	The proposed highwall stabilisation works may cause dust generation during extraction and emplacement. However, the Department considers these impacts would be negligible, and notes that Whitehaven has an approved air quality management plan to manage impacts. The Department considers no additional conditions of approval are required.
<i>Visual</i>	Whilst the emplacement of additional overburden would raise the northeast emplacement area by 6 m, visual impacts would not be significant as Whitehaven owns most of the properties in the vicinity of the mine and the closest non-mine owned property is 1.8 kilometres away. The emplacement area would also be progressively reshaped and rehabilitated to reduce its overall visual impact.
<i>Aboriginal Heritage</i>	Whitehaven would cease activities and notify Aboriginal stakeholders should any Aboriginal Heritage sites be identified during the proposed earthworks, in accordance with its Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Plan. The Department is satisfied that impacts are likely to be negligible, and are appropriately managed under existing conditions of approval.

Other Issues

All other issues are considered by the Department to have negligible environmental impacts and do not warrant further assessment.

5 CONCLUSION

The Department has assessed the modification application in accordance with the relevant requirements of the EP&A Act. Whitehaven has reviewed the Notice of Modification and accepts the revised conditions. The Department is satisfied that the proposed modification would:

- stabilise the eastern highwall of the Rocglen open-cut pit;
- ensure the safety of workers in the pit; and
- result in negligible changes to the approved project's environmental impacts.

The Department therefore believes that the proposed modification is in the public interest and should be approved.

6 RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that the Director, Mining and Industry Projects:

- **consider** the findings and recommendations of this report;
- **determine** that the proposed modification is within the scope of section 75W of the EP&A Act;
- **approve** the proposed modification under section 75W of the EP&A Act; and
- **sign** the attached Notice of Modification (Tag A).



Howard Reed

27.5.10

Manager, Mining Projects



David Kitto

Director, Mining & Industry Projects