

Planning Assessment Commission Speaking Notes—Sharon Veale, GML Heritage— Non-Aboriginal Cultural Heritage—September 2015

Members of the PAC, ladies and gentlemen

My name is Sharon Veale, I am a Partner and Director at GML Heritage. I am a historian and planner with 18 years' experience in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural heritage. I have specific experience in the assessment of historic cultural landscapes.

The Upper Hunter Valley is a significant historic cultural landscape, as the former PAC recognised when it stated 'the landscape in this part of the Hunter Valley has cultural significance due to its historic and continuing landuse patterns with the built heritage structures, unique topography, landforms and environment and may warrant listing at State or National Level'.

With regard to the DSCP I have provided advice to the previous PAC and prepared submissions to the Department of Planning. Yet despite several years the complete investigation and the assessment of non-Aboriginal cultural heritage values that might properly form part of an EIS is still to be adequately addressed by the proponent.

In short, this shortcoming will generate a range of risks and adverse impacts on the heritage significance of the historic cultural landscape that cannot be adequately managed through conditions of consent. The scale and magnitude of the proposed development activity is not reversible and a cautious approach in line with Article 3 of the ICOMOS Burra Charter, the heritage industry best-practice standard, and the application of the precautionary principle, is required.

I will address 4 key points in my presentation:

1. The DGRs and SEARS for non -Aboriginal Heritage have not been satisfied
2. A cultural landscape assessment under the NSW Assessment Criteria has not been conducted
3. The significance assessment is incomplete and focussed on impacts on tangible values
4. Assessment of Significance Comes First (Article 6 Burra Charter)

The non-Aboriginal heritage assessments undertaken for this proposal have repeatedly failed to comprehensively and adequately assess the non-Aboriginal cultural heritage values of the cultural landscape.

According to the industry best practice standard for heritage management the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, cultural significance comprises aesthetic, historic, social and scientific value for past, present and future generations.

- a) The level of significance (eg National, State or Local) for the cultural landscape and some other items has not been determined as part of the significance assessment by AECOM. This is standard practice and outlined in the Heritage Manual and other guidelines.
- b) The National Trust listing for the Muswellbrook –Jerrys Plains Landscape Conservation Area dates from 1984. At that time, Landscape Conservation Areas were selected on the basis of their ability to demonstrate 'exceptional natural and cultural values'.¹ The AECOM report relies on the description and values expressed in the National Trust Register Listing that is over 30 years old. No update to date significance assessment under the applicable NSW heritage assessment criteria has been undertaken by AECOM.

¹ Drayton South Coal Project Environmental Impact Statement, Non-Aboriginal Heritage Impact Assessment, Appendix P, AECOM, P-36.

- c) The cultural heritage landscape assessment has not been undertaken in accordance with the NSW heritage assessment criteria or accepted procedure outlined in the Heritage Manual or ICOMOS Burra Charter.

3. The significance assessment is incomplete and focussed on impacts on tangible values

The non-Aboriginal assessments for the Drayton South Coal Project have demonstrated and continued to selectively concentrate on individual physical items rather than the historic setting, items in the vicinity, and intangible values.

In the case of the Randwick property the heritage assessment remains incomplete.

The proposed management and mitigative measures for the heritage sites and heritage landscapes are focussed almost exclusively on physical impacts rather than impacts on historic, social, spiritual and scientific values, and setting, meanings and associations, which define cultural significance under the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter 2013. These values are of equal weight and should be assessed equally.

This bias has resulted in a non-Aboriginal heritage assessment that is seriously deficient as it does not adequately assess all heritage values and consequently does not enable a fully informed decision to be made regarding the potential heritage impacts of the Project.

One of the key findings in the Drayton South Coal Project PAC report (10 December 2013) was that

'the additional value derived from the surrounding cultural landscape setting and the continuity of land uses on the properties has not been recognised to any clear extent nor given any meaningful consideration'. (PAC report p 12)

This continues to be an issue.

4. Assessment of Significance Comes First (Article 6 Burra Charter)

An assessment of cultural significance is the accepted basis and necessary prerequisite for good decision making or management of heritage places.

Contrary to professional practice, as enshrined in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, for this project it appears that the Department is satisfied that the project may proceed subject to the Historic Heritage Management Plan being prepared. This is the cart before the horse.

Given the omissions in the significance assessments for heritage items including landscapes in the AECOM report it is not possible at this time to make sound well-informed decisions about future management of heritage within or in the vicinity of the Drayton South Coal mine.

The proponent should be required to prepare a complete assessment of non-Aboriginal heritage values and the cultural prior to any determination for this project. Substantial changes to the mine plan are not enough, rather substantial changes to the investigation and assessment are required.