

Notice of decision – Stratford Pumped Hydro and Solar

Section 2.22 and clause 20 of Schedule 1 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*

Application type	Critical State significant infrastructure
Application number and project name	SSI-73368213 Stratford Pumped Hydro and Solar
Proponent	Gloucester Coal Pty Ltd
Approval Authority	Minister for Planning and Public Spaces

Decision

The Minister for Planning and Public Spaces has, under section 5.19 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (**the Act**) approved the infrastructure application subject to conditions.

The key components of the development involve the construction and operation of:

- a pumped hydro storage project with a capacity of up to 300 MW/3,600 MW-hour (MWh), including:
 - a new upper reservoir, connecting tunnels and an underground powerhouse and associated infrastructure;
 - augmenting of the existing Stratford East Dam to serve as the lower reservoir;
- a 320 MW solar farm;
- an on-site substation to connect the project to the transmission network; and
- realignment of the existing Transgrid 132 kV transmission line that currently traverses the Stratford East Dam.

Construction of the development would take approximately 48 months. Once operational, the project would provide firming energy by storing surplus electricity during times of low demand and generating electricity during peak demand or when renewable generation in the grid is insufficient.

A copy of the Department's assessment report and the Minister's infrastructure approval are available [here](#).

Date of decision

10 July 2026

Reasons for decision

The following matters were taken into consideration in making this decision:

- the relevant matters required under the Act, including the objects of the Act;
- relevant Commonwealth and NSW legislation, policies and guidelines;
- all information submitted to the department during the assessment of the application;
- the findings and recommendations in the Planning Secretary's assessment report; and
- the views of the community about the project (see **Attachment 1**).

The findings and recommendations set out in the Department's assessment report were accepted and adopted as the reasons for making this decision.

The key reasons for approving the application are as follows:

- the project would play an essential role in supporting the transition from a long-standing reliance on coal-fired power stations to a reliance on renewable energy, and deliver economic benefits to NSW, including the creation of approximately 350 construction jobs and 10 operational jobs;
- the project would provide necessary long-duration energy storage and an on demand supplementary source of electricity when demand exceeds the supply of renewable electricity. It would be capable of providing "firming" power when variable sources of electricity such as solar and wind are not generating, which would help to maintain the stability and reliability of the electricity network;
- the Project is consistent with relevant NSW Government policies and guidelines, including the *Australia's Long Term Emissions Reduction Plan (2021)* and *Nationally Determined Contribution (2025)*, the *Electricity Strategy (2019)*, and more broadly the *Climate Change Policy Framework (2016)* and *Net Zero Stage 1: 2020 – 2030 (2020)* and *Implementation update (2022)*;
- the impacts on the community and the environment can be appropriately minimised, managed or offset to an acceptable level, in accordance with applicable NSW Government policies and standards;
- the issues raised by the community during consultation and in submissions have been considered and adequately addressed through changes to the project and the conditions of approval. Engagement on the project is considered to be in line with the *Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects*, including the participation objectives outlined in these guidelines (where applicable); and
- weighing all relevant considerations, the project is in the public interest.

Attachment 1 – Consideration of Community Views

The Department exhibited the application from 2 October 2024 until 29 October 2024 (28 days) and received 95 unique public submissions (74 in objection, four comments and 17 in support) and seven submissions from interest groups (6 in objection and one comment).

The Department also visited the site from 21 to 22 February 2025.

A summary of how the key issues raised by the community were taken into consideration is provided in the table below. Other issues are addressed in detail in the Planning Secretary's assessment report.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Consideration</i>
<i>Justification for the project</i> - Suitability of the site - Reliability of renewable energy technology - Consideration of alternative energy technologies such as nuclear and batteries - Loss of agricultural land, including impacts to food security and loss of grazing land	<i>Assessment</i> - The project is located on the existing Stratford Mining Complex (SMC), utilising the mine site and established infrastructure. Mining operations at the SMC were completed in 2024, and Stratford Coal has commenced the mine closure phase. - The Proponent would leverage the post-mining land use opportunity of the existing SMC where coal extraction is complete. - The project aligns with Commonwealth and State policies and legislation, which identify the need to diversify the energy generation mix and reduce the carbon emissions intensity of the grid while providing energy security and reliability; - The project would support the State's continued transition away from power generation derived from fossil fuels, which is largely dispatchable (able to quickly ramp up or down depending on electricity demands), to renewable energy generation such as wind and solar, which is inherently variable. - Over 80% of the project footprint is in previously disturbed areas associated with the SMC or areas mapped as exotic vegetation. - The Department considers that the project is an appropriate post-mining land use and presents a significant opportunity for mining-reliant communities to support economic diversification and future productivity. The development of appropriate renewable energy projects to enable NSW's ongoing energy transition has been identified as feasible and practicable post-mining land use <i>Conditions</i> - Stringent rehabilitation and decommissioning performance measures, including rehabilitation of disturbance areas and decommissioning of project infrastructure.
<i>Biodiversity</i> - Preservation of the natural environment - Impacts to threatened fauna species and entities at risk of Serious and Irreversible Impacts - Clearing of the upper reservoir - Loss of native vegetation and threatened species habitat, and connectivity to the adjacent Nature Reserve - Interfering with rehabilitation outcomes of the Stratford Mining Complex (SSD-4966)	<i>Assessment</i> - The majority of the project area is on previously disturbed mining land and cleared agricultural land. Larger patches of remnant vegetation are located in the upper reservoir footprint. - The 870 ha disturbance footprint includes around 145 ha of native vegetation, with 3 per cent of the disturbance footprint being a Threatened Ecological Community (TEC) listed under the BC Act and/or EPBC Act - The Proponent has conservatively assumed presence for a number of species in inaccessible areas of the upper reservoir footprint, and has committed to conducting pre-clearance surveys for threatened species in the previously inaccessible area. The survey results would determine the final offset liability for the project. - The Proponent assessed potential impacts for eight SAI entities, namely Scrub Turpentine, Native Guava, Sooty Owl, Stuttering Frog, Large-eared Pied Bat, Little Bent-winged Bat, Large Bent-winged Bat and the Eastern Cave Bat. - CPHR concluded the project was not likely to significantly contribute to the extinction of the Stuttering Frog, Sooty Owl, Eastern Cave Bat or the Large-eared Pied Bat, but had initial concerns that impacts to the Scrub Turpentine would result in an SAI. - The Department sought advice from the Independent Expert Advisory Panel for Energy Transition (the Panel), and considers that, subject to the recommended conditions, the project impact would not contribute significantly to the risk of extinction of any entity and would not constitute a SAI. <i>Conditions</i> - minimise the clearing of native vegetation and key fauna habitat including hollow bearing trees, within the project footprint and protect native

	vegetation and key fauna habitat outside the project footprint in accordance with limits in the recommended conditions. • prepare and implement a biodiversity management plan, including details of measures to avoid and minimise impacts to threatened species. • retire the relevant biodiversity credits in accordance with the NSW Biodiversity Offset Scheme prior to carrying out any development that could directly or indirectly impact biodiversity values requiring offset. • allow the Proponent to submit a Revised Offset Obligation report reflecting any additional avoidance achieved during detailed design, thereby providing a clear incentive to further reduce impacts on biodiversity prior to construction or reduce the credit liability for species assumed to be present through surveys.
<i>Spoil and Water</i> • potential water quality impacts from seepage losses and the management of spoil.	<i>Assessment</i> • Excavation of the upper reservoir, underground tunnels, powerhouse and associated infrastructure would generate significant volumes of soil and rock (spoil), requiring a strategy for permanent emplacement and beneficial reuse of excavated material. • The Proponent intends to reuse up to 8 million cubic metres (m³) of the total estimated 10 million m³ of the spoil generated (bulk). • Material excavated during construction of the project would be stored in designated temporary stockpile areas within the project footprint. Excess material not used during construction of the project would be transferred and emplaced in the SMC mine voids. • The Proponent has committed to managing material containing naturally occurring contaminants in line with established management practices at the SMC. • The Department is satisfied that there is sufficient capacity in the SMC mine voids to accommodate spoil from construction and that the objectives required under the existing SMC development consent could continue to be met. The ongoing management of the final mine voids is not part of the project and will continue to be regulated by the SMC development consent. • The Proponent refined the upper reservoir design to operate as a closed-loop system. Water would be transferred between the upper and lower reservoirs via the tunnel with no surface water inflows or outflows. • The Proponent would expand its existing water quality monitoring network upstream and downstream of the site, and these would be regulated under an Environment Protection Licence (EPL). • Water for initial reservoir filling would be sourced from existing SMC dams and voids, avoiding reliance on natural waterways. Groundwater seepage is predicted to be minimal and would flow towards the SMC Main Pit, which would remain as a groundwater sink post-closure of SMC. Engineering measures, including grouting of the underground tunnel, would further reduce seepage. No significant groundwater-dependent ecosystems are near the project. • The Proponent does not propose any discharges to surface water receivers from the pumped hydro project during operation, and the downstream surface water quality would not be significantly impacted. In any case, the Department notes that the Proponent would need to comply with any conditions required by an EPL and the relevant considerations under the <i>Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997</i> (POEO Act). • The Department has recommended conditions including a Water Management Plan that would detail the water quality monitoring program and performance measures. With these measures incorporated into a Water Management Plan, the NSW EPA, DCCEEW Water Group, and the Department are satisfied that surface water impacts can be appropriately managed. <i>Conditions</i> • Ensure any infrastructure, access roads and any other land disturbances have appropriate drainage and erosion and sediment controls designed, installed and maintained in accordance with <i>Best Practice Erosion and Sediment Control</i> (2008), and <i>Managing Urban Stormwater – Soils and Construction Volume 2C Unsealed Roads</i> (DECC, 2008); • Ensure all waterway crossings are constructed in accordance with the <i>Water Guidelines for Controlled Activities on Waterfront Land</i> (NRAR, 2018) and <i>Policy and Guidelines for Fish Habitat Conservation and Management</i> (2013) and <i>Why do Fish Need to Cross the Road?</i> (2003). • Prepare a Spoil Management Plan that provides an overarching framework for the management of all spoil generated on site.

- Prepare a Surface Water Management Plan and a Groundwater Management Plan (within an overarching Water Management Plan) that includes a detailed description of the surface water and groundwater management and monitoring systems, including measures to reduce potential for contamination, including:
 - minimising the erosion and generation and dispersion of sediment using suitable controls generally in accordance with the Managing Urban Stormwater: Soils and Construction;
 - carrying out all works within 40 m of any drainage line generally in accordance with the requirements in the Guidelines for Controlled Activities on Waterfront Land (DPI, 2018);
 - no active discharges to surface waters from the upper or lower reservoirs except to the SMC voids (subject to commercial agreement) or where permitted under an EPL; and
 - maintaining adequate freeboard to minimise risk of discharge to surface waters.