Notice of Decision – Snowy 2.0 Main Works

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	Snowy 2.0 - Main Works (CSSI 9687)
Applicant	Snowy Hydro Limited
Approval Authority	Minister for Planning and Public Spaces

Decision

Under section 5.19 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (**the Act**), the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces has approved the infrastructure application to develop the Snowy 2.0 Main Works, subject to conditions.

The Main Works involve construction and operation of a pumped hydro-electric power station and tunnels connecting the Talbingo and Tantangara reservoirs in the Kosciuszko National Park.

Construction of the project would take 6 years, and once operational the project would produce up to 2,000 megawatts of electricity for the National Electricity Market.

A copy of the Department's assessment report and Minister's infrastructure approval are available here.

Date of decision

20 May 2020

Reasons for decision

The following matters were taken into consideration in making this decision:
- the environmental impact statement for the project;
- issues raised in submissions;
- Snowy Hydro's response to issues raised in submissions and the Preferred Infrastructure Report;
- advice from key government agencies, including the National Parks and Wildlife Service;
- relevant Commonwealth and NSW legislation, policies and guidelines; and
- the findings and recommendations of the Department's assessment report.

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:
- it would maximise the use of the existing Snowy scheme;
- the project is critical for energy security and reliability in NSW, and would play an essential role in helping to stabilise the NEM as it transitions away from a long-standing reliance on coal-fired power stations to a reliance on renewable energy;
- it would deliver significant economic benefits to NSW and the Snowy Mountains region to assist the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including attracting at least $4.6 billion of capital investment, creating 2,000 construction jobs and helping to reduce electricity prices;
- the project has been designed to minimise any impacts on the KNP, including reducing the footprint of the project to less than 0.09% of the KNP during construction and 0.014% during operations; and
- the residual impacts of the project can be reduced to an acceptable level by requiring Snowy Hydro to rehabilitate the site to a high standard following construction and to contribute at least $85.8 million (on top of the $13.46 million already paid) to fund actions to enhance the KNP and address any remaining risks.
- weighing all relevant considerations, the project is in the public interest.

Attachment 1 – Consideration of Community Views

During the assessment of the Main Works, the Department consulted widely with the community, special interest groups and government agencies. This engagement included:

- exhibiting the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) from 26 September to 6 November 2019;
- holding several public information sessions in the local area, including at Cooma, Cabramurra, Talbingo and Tumut;
- meeting regularly with key stakeholders, including the National Parks Association of NSW (NPA);
- working closely with government agencies, including the Commonwealth, key State agencies (such as the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Environment Protection Authority, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Transport for NSW), and the Snowy Valleys and Snowy Monaro Regional Councils;
- inspecting the site and surrounds several times; and
- making all relevant documents on the project publicly available on the Department's website, including all public submissions and Snowy Hydro's formal response to the issues raised in these submissions.

During the public exhibition, the Department received 222 submissions, including 10 from government agencies, 30 from special interest groups and 182 from the general public.

Most submissions (73%) strongly opposed the project because of its impacts on KNP and supported the NPA's detailed submission, which objected on the basis that the project would have unprecedented impacts on KNP and that there are better alternatives to Snowy 2.0.

Although most of the remaining submissions supported the project due to its economic benefits, some people were concerned about the potential impacts of the project on local businesses, tourism and the amenity of nearby towns (traffic, noise and dust), including Adaminaby, Talbingo and Cooma.

The table below includes a summary of how the key issues raised by the community were taken into consideration.

Issue	***Consideration***
Development within KNP • inconsistent with objectives to protect national parks • impact on aesthetics, visitor experience and tourism	• Even with careful design, the project would adversely affect parts of the back country of the KNP during construction with native vegetation and threatened species habitat cleared, certain recreation areas closed to the public, and traffic, dust and noise impacts on areas of the KNP. • On completion of the project, the majority of the infrastructure would be underground except for permanent water intakes and buildings on Talbingo and Tantangara reservoir and smaller surface elements at Lobs Hole and Marica. • The impacts of the project can be reduced to an acceptable level with conditions requiring Snowy to minimise disturbance and rehabilitate those areas to a high standard leaving a small operational footprint, implement a visual mitigation plan and offset biodiversity impacts through payment to NPWS to enhance the biodiversity values of the KNP. *Conditions* • Rehabilitate disturbed areas to fully restore native vegetation and threatened species habitat and provide enhanced recreational facilities at Lobs Hole and Tantangara reservoir. • Offset the biodiversity impacts of native vegetation clearing through payment of $73.8 million to NPWS to implement conservation actions throughout KNP. • Prepare a visual mitigation plan to blend the infrastructure as much as possible with the landscape. • Develop a digital application for users of KNP to enhance their knowledge and enjoyment of the park.
Biodiversity • scale of disturbance • impacts on threatened species • adequacy of offsets	• The project has been designed to minimise impact with 425 ha of native vegetation to be removed, with 388 ha being inside KNP and including areas of habitat for threatened species. • There is one listed threatened ecological community, the Alpine Sphagnum Bogs and Fens within the disturbance footprint, with 1.03 ha proposed to be cleared. • The impacts of the project can be reduced to an acceptable level with conditions requiring Snowy to minimise disturbance and rehabilitate those areas to a high standard leaving a small operational footprint, offset biodiversity impacts through payment to NPWS to deliver major conservation benefits for key threatened species and communities.

Issue	Consideration
	Conditions • Pay the NPWS up to $73.8 million to carry out conservation actions in other parts of KNP to offset the residual biodiversity impacts of the project (on top of the $8.5 million already paid to NPWS for the exploratory works). • Undertake ecological rehabilitation to a high standard in accordance with objectives to restore vegetation composition, structure and ecosystem function of disturbed areas within set time frames. • Prepare and implement mitigation measures in accordance with a Rehabilitation Management Plan and a Biodiversity Management Plan.
Biosecurity • transfer of pests and viruses between reservoirs and downstream • impacts on threatened fish • impacts on recreational fishing	• During operation there is potential for movement of pest fish and disease from the Talbingo Reservoir to Tantangara Reservoir and potentially further downstream. • Snowy has proposed to install large fish screens to prevent the spread of pest fish and disease downstream of Tantangara Reservoir, and install a fish barrier on Tantangara Creek and restock trout in Tantangara Reservoir and Lake Eucumbene if there are impacts on recreational fishing. • The potential impacts can be further reduced by conditions requiring Snowy Hydro to develop and implement captive breeding programs, establish a restocking program for the trout fishery, prepare a detailed Biosecurity Management Plan and minimise the impacts of the project on other threatened fish species and their habitat within the disturbance area. *Conditions* • Develop a detailed captive breeding program for the Macquarie Perch and Stocky Galaxias, involving the spending of $5 million over 5 years during construction to establish self-sustaining, insurance populations of these species in the surrounding region. • Review this program and develop a trigger, action, response plan for the expansion of this program over time, if necessary. • Prepare and implement a detailed Biosecurity Management Plan for the project to minimise the development-related biosecurity risks of the project. • Minimise the impacts of the project on other threatened fish species and their habitat within the disturbance area. • Develop a Recreational Fishing Plan, which includes a program involving the spending of $5 million over 5 years during construction to develop the capability to restock, and to restock the Tantangara Reservoir and Lake Eucumbene with trout.
Recreation • closure of Tantangara Road • impacts on recreational fishing, horse camps and tourism operators • reduced water quality	• There will be short term impacts on recreational users during construction and potential for long term impacts on recreational fishing. • The potential for impacts on recreational fishing can be reduced through a detailed Recreational Fishing Management Plan including restocking trout in Tantangara Reservoir and Lake Eucumbene if there are impacts on recreational fishing and conditions requiring Snowy Hydro to reinstate public access and enhance recreational facilities following construction. *Conditions* • Pay NPWS $1,995,000 to offset recreational impacts on the KNP. • Reinstate public access to Tantangara Road after it is upgraded. • Enhance recreational facilities at Lobs Hole and Tantangara following completion of construction. • Prepare a recreational fishing management plan, including payment of $5 million to develop capability for restocking Tantangara reservoir and Lake Eucumbene with trout.
Spoil Disposal • water quality impacts • management of potential asbestos and acidic contaminants	• Following extensive consultation with agencies and through options evaluation, Snowy Hydro substantially revised the strategy to address the water quality concerns, ensuring only coarse materials would be placed within the reservoirs and fine materials above the full supply level. • The potential impacts from spoil emplacement can be further reduced by testing, classifying and managing all spoil in accordance with strict requirements and minimising disposal into reservoirs, implementing special procedures to manage any reactive or contaminated spoil, and developing detailed plans for all spoil disposal in the KNP to ensure any landforms created are natural, free-draining,

Issue	Consideration
	complement the existing landscape and are returned to woodland. *Conditions* • Test, classify and manage excavated material including procedures for contaminated material. • Maximise reuse of material. • Minimising any spoil disposal to the reservoirs. • Create stable geomorphic landforms with integrated drainage and high habitat variability. • Ensure enough topsoil or suitable growth medium to sustain revegetation. • Prepare a spoil management plan in consultation with key agencies.
Amenity • increased traffic and road safety • increased dust and noise	• The main roads used for the project, including the Snowy Mountains Highway, Link Road and Lobs Hole Ravine Road have sufficient spare capacity to accommodate the increased construction traffic. • Some road upgrades would be required to improve accessibility and safety and a traffic management plan would be required to manage scheduling, peak periods, over sized vehicle deliveries and break downs. • The potential impacts can be further reduced by requiring Snowy Hydro to minimise the water quality, dust, noise, visual and traffic impacts of the project. *Conditions* • Require Snowy Hydro to minimise the traffic and noise of the project through a traffic management plan and a construction noise management plan. • Upgrade roads and intersections to the satisfaction of TfNSW and NPWS. • Schedule heavy vehicle movements to minimise disruptions and rapidly respond to incidents. • Implement all reasonable and feasible measures to minimise dust, odour, fume and blast emissions.