Hunter-Central Rivers CMA CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

PCU013759

Contact: Trevor Cameron
Phone: 4938 4937
Fax: 4930 1030
Email: trevor.cameron@cma.nsw.gov.au

Mr Colin Phillips
Senior Planner, Mining
NSW Department of Planning
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

File:

Your Ref: 1003652
Our Ref: A419789

20 August 2010

Dear Mr Phillips

Subject: Austar Coal Project (08_0111)

I refer to your letter dated 26 July 2010 inviting submissions on the proposal by Austar to modify its development consent (DA29/95) under section 75W of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* 1979.

As you would be aware, the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA) provided comments on the proposal to develop Stage 3 of the Austar Coal Project in November 2008 and on the environmental assessment (EA) requirements on 24 August 2007.

The CMA recommends that you review the content of these two submissions in light of the current proposal particularly regarding the cumulative impacts that may result in increased subsidence and its associated impacts on aquifers and river systems.

The comments below will focus on the proposed modification to DA29/95, namely the addition of one extra longwall panel, Longwall A5a (LW 5a5), adjacent to Longwall A5 (Fig. 1.2 in the EA).

The CMA notes that the proposed modification will increase the maximum allowable extraction height of coal to be mined in this area from 4.5 metres to 6.5 metres. The proposal will also grant approval to the use of Longwall Top Coal Caving (LTCC) technology.

While LTCC methodology will allow for more efficient recovery of the coal resource and increased economic returns, the CMA has concerns regarding the proximity of the underground works to Quorrobolong Creek and Cony Creek. These 2nd and 3rd order creek systems run through the middle and the northern and west/south-western boundaries of the proposal.

1. Impacts on aquifers and river systems

The CMA notes the following extract from Section 7.4.2 of the EA Potential Impacts that: "due to the depth of the coal seam (approximately 500m) and the long history of mining in the area, that mining within LW A5a is not expected to cause significant changes in the availability of groundwater resource in the area". However, the EA also states that there is the potential for 'hydraulically interconnected cracking' of the shallow alluvial aquifers associated with Quorrobolong Creek and Cony Creek which may result in groundwater loss as a result of cracking of strata over the goaf. The CMA recommends further investigation and action to reduce this risk as much as possible.

2. Cumulative impacts

The CMA notes that the cumulative impact of the LW A5a extension proposal is identified as negligible in the EA. The overall impact of the Stage 2 and Stage 3 proposals are predicted to result in an additional subsidence of 200mm at the eastern extent and 400mm above the north-eastern extent of the LW A5a proposal. As a result, the modelled changes to flood hazard categories and flood extents indicate only minor localised changes to the remnant ponding and overland flowpaths in the area with some additional ponding increases adjacent to the confluence of Quorrobolong and Cony Creeks. Additional ponding is limited to existing flow paths, paddocks and dams so not a major concern

3. Flora and fauna impacts

The majority of the 17ha modification is made up of derived grassland with approximately 1.7ha of River Flat Eucalyptus Forest (RFEF), 0.3ha of Lower Hunter-Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest (LHSG) both EEC's and 0.3ha of Swamp Oak Riparian Forest.

The CMA notes that the potential ecological impacts of the Stage 2 extension project will be limited to subsidence related impacts as there is no proposed clearing of native vegetation at the site as a result of the proposed extension

Given that the predicted levels of surface and groundwater disturbance as a result of subsidence are reported as being minimal, any impacts on flora or fauna species or vegetation communities resulting from the proposed extension are likely to be negligible. Nevertheless the CMA would recommend that Austar install two new monitoring stations. One in the LHSGI Forest EEC and one in the RFEF EEC at the southern reach of Quorrobolong Creek. The CMA is of the view that the monitoring stations be set up at these locations to monitor the effects of subsidence or other impacts on these EEC's.

The CMA appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on this proposal. If you have any queries regarding this information, please contact Trevor Cameron Catchment Officer, Projects on 4938 4937.

Yours sincerely

Callaghan Cotter

Callaghan Cotter
for Fiona Marshall
General Manager