

WARKWORTH COAL MINE
ASSESSMENT REPORT

Warkworth Coal Mine
Proposed Upgrade to the Mount Thorley Warkworth Electrical Switchyard
Modification Application DA 300-9-2002 MOD 3

1. BACKGROUND

The Warkworth mine is located in the Upper Hunter Valley about 12 kilometres southwest of Singleton (see Figure 1) and is managed by Rio Tinto Coal Australia through its subsidiary Coal and Allied. It is an existing open cut coal mine that has been producing coal, for export and domestic markets, since operations began in 1981.

The Warkworth mine currently operates under a development consent issued by the Minister Assisting the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Planning Administration) on 19 May 2003, which allows the mine to produce 18 million tonnes of ROM coal per year.

The area surrounding the site is dominated by coal mining, industrial development and agriculture. Hunter Valley Operations and Warkworth village are located to the north of the mine, Mount Thorley Operations to the south, the Mount Thorley Coal Loader to the east and Bulga village to the west.

Warkworth and neighbouring Mount Thorley open cut coal mines now share common ownership and are managed as a single operation known as "Mount Thorley Warkworth", or "MTW".

The existing MTW electrical switchyard (see Figure 2 and Plate 1) was approved by Singleton Shire Council in 1998 and is located within the existing infrastructure footprint of the Warkworth mine site. However, Council's approval was surrendered in 2003 in accordance with the Ministerial consent for the extension of Warkworth coal mine. The Ministerial consent also gave approval for, among other matters, the continued operation of the MTW electrical switchyard.

To meet the combined operational electrical supply needs of the MTW operation, Coal and Allied wishes to modify its existing development consent to allow it to upgrade the existing MTW switchyard.

2. PROPOSED MODIFICATION

Coal and Allied proposes to upgrade the capacity of the MTW electrical switchyard from 80 to 100 mega volt-ampere (MVA). The upgrade includes:

- removing two 15 MVA electrical transformers;
- installing a new 50 MVA transformer;
- integrating an existing 50 MVA transformer and the new transformer into the electrical supply system;
- upgrading existing foundations, blast wall, bunding and fencing; and
- installing a new high voltage 33kV switchroom housing high voltage switch gear and control systems.

The proposal would be contained within the existing electrical switchyard compound (46m x 37m) and has a capital cost of \$2 million. The mine's operation, tonnes of coal produced and number of staff employed would be unaffected by the proposed modification.



Figure 1: Regional Setting



Figure 2: Location of MTW Electrical Switchyard



Plate 1: MTW Electrical Switchyard

3. STATUTORY CONTEXT

On 16 October 2007, Coal and Allied lodged an application (DA 300-9-2002 MOD 3) to modify its development consent under section 96(1A) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act), to allow for the upgrade of the switchyard.

Under section 96(1A) of the EP&A Act, a consent authority may modify a development consent if it is satisfied that:

- a) *the proposed modification is of minimal environmental impact, and*
- b) *the development to which the consent as modified relates is substantially the same development for which consent was originally granted and before that consent as originally granted was modified (if at all).*

The Department has assessed the potential impacts of the proposal (see Section 5) and is satisfied that the proposed modification would be of minimal environmental impact and that the development, as modified, would remain substantially the same development for which consent was originally granted.

The Minister was the consent authority for the original development application, and is consequently the consent authority for this application. On 5 April 2006, the Minister delegated his powers and functions as a consent authority to modify development consents under section 96(1A) of the EP&A Act to the Executive Director, Major Project Assessment. Consequently, the Executive Director may determine the application under delegated authority.

4. CONSULTATION

The Department believes that, as the proposed modification involves the replacement and upgrade of portion of an existing facility, its scale is unlikely to generate any environmental

impacts beyond the existing approved mine site and that there are no affected parties that should be consulted about this proposal. There are also no requirements for public participation under section 96 (1A) of the EP&A Act. Consequently, no notification or consultation with the public or Government agencies was undertaken.

5. CONSIDERATION

The Department has assessed the application for the proposal in accordance with the requirements of section 79C of the EP&A Act and the objects of the Act (see table below).

Issue	Department's Consideration
Flora and fauna	No impact. The MTW switchyard is located in a previously disturbed area. No vegetation would be cleared and no fauna habitat would be affected.
Aboriginal cultural heritage	No impact. There are no known Aboriginal sites within the area of the proposed modification and the site consists of previously disturbed ground.
Traffic	Negligible impact. Trucks would be required to access the site to deliver new equipment and concrete, and to remove two redundant transformers. Transport for up to 6 construction workers over a three month period would have no discernable impact on local road volumes or safety.
Construction impacts	Negligible or no off site impacts. All construction activities would occur within an existing sealed switchyard compound of limited area (0.2 hectares), located over 500 metres from the Mount Thorley industrial area and over a kilometre from private residences. Accordingly, the Department believes that construction activities would not alter existing: • noise impacts; • visual impacts; • dust emissions; or • water quality or runoff volumes.
Operational impacts	None. The upgraded switchyard would occupy the same site and be operated in the same manner as the existing switchyard.

6. CONCLUSION

The Department has assessed the proposal against the objects of the EP&A Act and the matters listed under section 79C of the Act, and is satisfied that:

- the development as modified would remain consistent with the objectives and requirements of relevant planning instruments;
- the proposed upgrade of the MTW electrical switchyard would not change the environmental impacts of the approved Warkworth Coal mine development; and
- the proposed modification is in the public interest as it would facilitate the operation of the Warkworth and Mount Thorley coal mines which provide significant local employment and economic benefits to the State.

Consequently, the Department is satisfied that the proposed modification should be approved, subject to conditions. Coal and Allied has no objection to the recommended conditions of consent.

7. RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that the Executive Director, Major Project Assessment, exercise the powers and functions delegated to him in the Instrument of Delegation from Minister Sartor, dated 5 April 2006, and:

- consider this report;
- determine that the development, as modified, is substantially the same development for which consent was originally granted;
- approve the proposed modification under section 96(1A) of the EP&A Act, subject to conditions set out in the attached notice of modification; and
- sign the attached notice of modification (Tag A).

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