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Karuah East Quarry Project - Environmental Assessment Report – Submission (Project MP 09-0175)

I would extend to the Minister for Planning and the Director General my gratitude for the opportunity to offer comment regarding the proposed quarry located approximately 3 km's north of Karuah and approximately 15 hectares in total area. I understand that Karuah East proposes to extract up to 1.5 million tonnes of andesite material per year which is suited to a wide range of uses including production of aggregate and road base. Therefore I offer commentary below as my understanding of the information contained in the Environmental Assessment Report.

Noise, Blasting and Vibration:

The modelling undertaken demonstrates that noise and vibration levels associated with operations, traffic and blasts satisfy Australian & NSW standards. In assessing the report I am satisfied that the conclusion that the proposed Karuah East quarry is acceptable in terms of noise, blasting and vibration. Predicted noise levels are evaluated against applicable criteria to determine compliance. These are in accordance with all the relevant Government and Industry legislation, policies and guidelines.

Traffic

The Traffic Impact Assessment clearly articulates that the proposal will generate a need to upgrade & extend Blue Rock Lane, realign the Andesite Road & Blue Rock Lane intersection and adjust the existing road markings at the Branch Lane & Andesite Road intersection. Given that Karuah East Quarry Pty Ltd has committed to undertake these works in collaboration with RMS I cannot foresee any traffic implications regarding the proposal.

Flora and Fauna:

The Ecological Assessment undertaken, whilst identifying one Endangered Ecological Community; two threatened flora species; and five threatened fauna species, the mitigation proposal is sound. The assessment considers the impact of the proposal on these species and confirmed that the proposal was acceptable provided that a number of mitigation measures are implemented including the creation of a conservation offset which Karuah East Pty Ltd have committed to. This application and the findings regarding flora and fauna are distinctly similar to the Karuah By - Pass proposal and again that project implemented sound mitigation and offset criteria. Given my overall basic knowledge, I am satisfied that the assessment describes the existing biological environment of the study area in relation to terrestrial flora and fauna and discusses the potential impacts of the various components of the proposal on any threatened species, populations or ecological communities that occur or are likely to occur within the study area. I am also satisfied that the report has adequately considered the impacts and adequately recommends measures proposed to mitigate those impacts.

Visual and Lighting Impacts:

The visual assessment illustrates that the combined influence of landform and existing vegetation will screen the majority of views from residences in the surrounding area and that the proposed quarry is acceptable from a visual perspective. From a lighting perspective, given the proposed quarries location, lighting spill will not be problematic.

Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions:

I am satisfied that the estimations of emissions from all proposed quarry activities confirm that the proposal is predicted to comply with nationally established criteria levels. The Greenhouse Gas Assessment performed for the project calculated both direct and indirect emissions in accordance with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol and found that the proposal is acceptable.

Surface and Groundwater Quality:

The Surface Water Assessment confirms that water quality management facilities will be incorporated to ensure the quality of any surface water runoff. The Groundwater Assessment confirms that the groundwater level at the quarry site is greater than 10m below the quarry floor and the proposal is highly unlikely to have any impact on groundwater quality.

Quarry Closure and Rehabilitation:

A Quarry Closure and Rehabilitation Plan prepared, confirms that spoil (topsoil etc) material will be stockpiled on site during commencement of the operation and used within rehabilitation of the disturbed areas. The Closure and Rehabilitation Plan will ensure creation of acceptable land use suitability and a stable landform once quarrying ceases and the preservation of downstream water quality.

Geotechnical and Soil Assessment:

The Soil Survey and Land Resource Assessment undertaken confirm the adequacy of the geology and soils to enable effective site rehabilitation. Geotechnical conditions were addressed in the Groundwater Assessment and the Resource Assessment. It conclusively demonstrates that the geotechnical conditions of the site are suitable for quarrying activity and that there is a significant deposit of hard rock 'andesite' material on the site.

Contemporary and Aboriginal Heritage:

From the EAR reports I am satisfied that no Aboriginal or European cultural heritage sites were identified during the study area survey.

The Aboriginal cultural heritage result supports the AHIMS search that found no sites had been recorded in the area. Sites that have been recorded were found in association with the headwaters of Port Stephens and the Karuah River approximately five kilometres to the south and east respectively from the study area.

The European heritage result found a landscape that would be considered marginal for early settlers. Early occupation would have most likely focused on the removal of timber and grazing of stock.

The pedestrian field survey found the study area to have been subjected to previous land clearing. Given the survey coverage of the survey area and the consistent disturbances across its whole, I would concur that the likelihood of unearthing *in situ* and contextual Aboriginal archaeological deposits is extremely low. However, I note that the CEO of the Karuah LALC, Mr. Dave Feeney has recommended when the removal of topsoil to 2m down commences that KLALC cultural officers be there, and I would commend such.

Cumulative Considerations:

Key cumulative considerations associated with the proposed development in respect of the operations of the existing Karuah Quarry include traffic; noise & blasting; dust emissions; water management (surface & groundwater); land clearing; visual impact and rehabilitation.

Specialist reports for each of these matters have been prepared as part of the Environmental Assessment and it was clearly demonstrated that the proposal has a little or no risk of contributing to adverse cumulative impacts.

Conclusion:

With due consideration, of the Environmental Assessment Report in line with the Director Generals Requirements, I am satisfied that the DGR's have been achieved.

From the information I have provided above, aspects that need to be reiterated regarding this proposal are those relating to Socio – Economic impacts. As a past member of Hunter Councils Incorporated, I have been aware of Karuah East Pty Ltd and the close economic association the company has with a number of other companies.

These companies include Hunter Land Development Pty Ltd and GWH Building Pty Ltd (a construction company) and Hunter Ready Mixed Concrete Pty Ltd who operate a number of concrete batching plants in Tea Gardens, Thornton, Gateshead, Warnervale and Cessnock. As a conglomeration of companies, it is imperative to the well being of their viability and longevity that a finite resource such as this extractive industry provides not only continues but is expanded on.

Whilst the Karuah East Pty Ltd's support of community and not for profit organisations is well know, the overall conglomeration of companies that derive benefit from their operations is critical to the socio economic drivers of the Hunter Region as a whole.

Given my interpretation and comments made in my submission, I cannot see any major impediments to prevent this application being determined and subsequently approved (with appropriate conditions and mitigation control).

Again, I would extend to the NSW Planning Minister, the Director General and the NSW Department of Planning my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to offer comment regarding this extractive industry proposal.

Best Regards.



Mr. Glenn Wall
01 April 2013.