



**Catchment Management
Authority**
Hunter-Central Rivers



PCU037811

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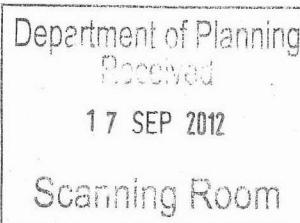
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File: LVDA088

Your ref: SSI-4992

Our ref: A1062320

Director, Infrastructure Projects
Major Projects Assessment
Department of Planning and Infrastructure
23-33 Bridge Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000



Dear Sir/Madam,

Subject: State Significant Infrastructure – Hexham Relief Roads (SSI-4992)

I refer to your correspondence of 7 August 2012 seeking comments from the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA) on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the above proposal. The CMA has reviewed the EIS documentation against the Catchment Action Plan (CAP) and provides the following comments.

The key issues that the CMA has concerns about include:

- The provision of suitable offsets for the 9.1 ha of Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) proposed to be removed as part of this project that meet the 'improve or maintain' (IoM) principles of the Catchment Action Plan. The potential for impacts on groundwater at the site, including 'drawdown' that may result in creating Acid Sulphate Soils (ASS); and
- Changes to the existing hydrology that may result in changes in flow direction and volume causing negative impacts on water quality

Offsets for the clearing of native vegetation

The CMA expects the proponent to develop an offset package using either the Environmental Outcomes Assessment Methodology (EOAM) or Biobanking methodology and carried out by a qualified Biobanking practitioner. At the very least the proponent should incorporate the principles underpinning Biobanking and/or the EOAM in the development of offsets that meet the 'improve or maintain' test.

Information on the EOAM methodology is available at
www.environment.nsw.gov.au/vegetation/eoam/index.htm

Information on Biobanking methodology is available at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/biobanking>

The CMA would appreciate the opportunity to review the package once completed.

The CMA notes that the amount of offset required could be reduced by altering the location of some of the infrastructure including the office and amenities block, carpark and turntable areas to adjacent sites that are already cleared of native vegetation (Fig. 4.4c). As the EIS does not contain adequate details of a specific offset package, the CMA is unable to properly assess or support the proposal at this time.

Consistency with the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Action Plan

The Catchment Action Plan (CAP) is a whole-of government approach to natural resource management which has been endorsed by the NSW Government. The CAP contains specific guiding principles that outline how natural resource management should occur in the Hunter-Central Rivers region to improve or maintain environmental outcomes. The guiding principles for Biodiversity, land use planning and estuary and marine have particular relevance to this project. The CMA requests that these CAP guiding principles be taken into consideration both in the EIS and during implementation for the life of the project.

The CAP is available at <http://www.hcr.cma.nsw.gov.au>.

The following is a list of specific guiding principles with particular relevance to this proposal.

1. Minimising habitat destruction and improving the condition of habitat – The CMA will support in principle planning measures which reduce or avoid impacts of development on threatened species and communities such as Regional Conservation Plans and the Biodiversity Offsets 'Biobanking scheme.
2. Maintain or improve the condition of estuary and marine areas – If estuarine or marine aquatic habitat must be disturbed as a result of development then other areas of wetland habitat should offset this loss
3. To prevent species, populations and ecological communities from becoming threatened or extinct, it is important to preserve high quality salt marsh, mangrove, estuarine, seagrass, marine and marine shoreline habitat that remains in the long-term. It is also important to improve degraded saltmarsh, mangrove, estuarine, seagrass, marine and marine shoreline habitat to increase the limited wetland habitat that now exists.
4. Habitat should be restored to a healthy state so native species are able to outcompete exotic species
5. The cumulative impacts of development activities on our natural resources should be taken into consideration in landuse planning

6. The use and development of natural resources should be sustainable
7. Where practical, future development should be restricted to primarily cleared land. Where loss of vegetation is unavoidable, native vegetation offsets should be used

Implementation of World Best Management Practice for Natural Resource Management

The CMA is concerned that the value of the wetlands is not correctly ascribed in section L volume 4. The report asserts that the habitats are degraded and notes that wetlands (Hexham Swamp) offer an opportunity to manage contamination events more easily. The CMA has determined that the Hexham Swamp is one of the highest priority wetland systems in the CMA area and is currently being rehabilitated to an estuarine wetland system. The CMA expects that best management practice stormwater, sediment and erosion control practices are incorporated into the proposal to ensure that water quality in the receiving waters including the wetlands is not compromised. The CMA notes that a suite of management plans are proposed to deal with groundwater, ASS, WQ and altered hydrological flow. It is imperative that these plans are implemented to a high standard and that the effectiveness of these plans is monitored for the life of the project

Impacts of Flooding

The CMA notes that the project forecasts changes in the flood pattern and increases in flood heights within the Hexham Swamp. The CMA defers comment on the impacts of the project on the Lower Hunter Flood Mitigation Scheme to the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact Callaghan Cotter, Catchment Coordinator Lower Hunter on 4938 4935.

Yours faithfully



Callaghan Cotter
for
Fiona Marshall
General Manager

12 September 2012