



**Catchment Management
Authority**
Hunter-Central Rivers

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File: LVDA088

Your ref: MP 07_0171

Our ref: A1247750

Mr Mick Fallon
Department of Planning and Infrastructure
23-33 Bridge Street
GPO Box 39
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Mr Fallon,

**Subject: Exhibition of Environmental Assessment for QR National Train
Support Facility (MP 07_0171)**

I refer to your correspondence of 19 November 2012 seeking comments from the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA) on the Exhibition of Environmental Assessment for QR National Train Support Facility (MP 07_0171).

As you would be aware, the CMA previously reviewed the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documentation for the Hexham Relief Roads project (SSI-4992) and forwarded comments to you. The Hexham Relief Roads proposal is located adjacent to this proposal. Please note that the CMA's advice is relevant for both proposals.

In addition, the CMA expects that the cumulative impacts of both projects are considered when assessing the loss of Endangered Ecological Communities (EECs), an SEPP 14 wetland and the impacts of altered hydrology at the site. The offset proposal and mitigation methods must be sufficient to address the cumulative impacts of both proposals.

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

Key Issues of concern relevant to this proposal:

- The proposed clearing of 7.48 ha of EEC at the QR site and 9.1 ha at the ARTC site (results in a cumulative loss of 16.58 ha EEC). There is also a loss of 3.16 ha of native vegetation not deemed to be EEC at the QR site. This total loss of native vegetation and EEC must be offset to meet the 'improve or maintain principle' of the Catchment Action Plan (CAP);
- The proposed infilling of an SEPP 14 Wetland (5.69 ha) and how this loss is proposed to be offset;
- The potential for impacts on groundwater at the site, including 'drawdown' that may result in creating Acid Sulphate Soils (ASS) must be adequately addressed;
- Changes to the existing hydrology and flood levels that may result in changes in flow direction and volume causing negative impacts on water quality; and The importation of fill to the site and the potential for increased contamination

The CMA notes the history of this site and the fact that between 1930 and 1987 much of the site was used as a coal preparation plant and as such contains a mix of both cleared and disturbed land and includes areas of contamination. The CMA requires advice on how this contamination will be remediated and managed into the longer term including a risk assessment of the likelihood of it impacting on the surrounding Hunter Wetlands National Park.

Offsets for the clearing of native vegetation

The EA states that 'the magnitude of this proposal has been assessed with the result that no threatened species or communities are considered likely to be significantly affected by the proposal'. The CMA notes that the building footprint for the Northern construction compound (3 ha) is located on predominantly cleared land whereas the southern construction compound (5 ha) will involve the clearing of EEC. The proposal will require the removal of 9.1 ha of EEC within the total 10.64 ha native vegetation removal and must be offset under the CMAs Catchment Action Plan (CAP).

In the first instance, the CMA suggests that moving the Southern construction compound to the west would reduce the impact on native vegetation and this should be considered.

The CMA notes that Biobanking methodology has been used in the EA to produce an offset package that proposes a Tier 2 outcome for three out of the four impacted EECs and a Tier 3 outcome for the Coastal floodplain sedgeland community. This results in approximately 53.63 ha EEC being set aside for conservation in-situ under a Conservation Agreement with Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH).

The CMA is concerned however that a significant proportion of the offset in the southern portion of the proposal is identified as a 'Future Investigation Area' (Figure 7) and seeks clarification as to the implications of this on future offset areas.

Further 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 it is finalised.

Proposed infilling of an SEPP 14 Wetland (5.69 ha)

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 notes the lack of detail on how the proponent will offset the loss of 5.69 ha of SEPP 14 wetland and seeks clarification on this issue.

Stormwater, groundwater, hydrology, Acid Sulphate Soils (ASS) and contamination issues

The CMA expects the proponent to implement world's best management practice in dealing with potential impacts of the proposal on Hexham Swamp and Hunter Wetlands National Park. The nature of the facility indicates that the risk from

contamination or pollution would be increased. The CMA has invested over \$10m of NSW and Commonwealth funding rehabilitating Hexham Swamp. The water quality in the receiving waters should not be compromised.

The CMA notes that a suite of management plans are proposed to deal with groundwater, ASS, Storm Water, 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 of between 5 and 10cm in the area. In the context of the relief of the land in this area the CMA is of the view that this may be quite significant, particularly when cumulative impacts of Hexham Relief Roads and Northbank Hub are taken into account. However, the CMA defers detailed comment on the impacts of the project on the Lower Hunter Flood Mitigation Scheme to the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage as they have more expertise in flood analysis.

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

20 December 2012