

Assoc. Professor Andrew Hopkins
Acting Director

12 April 2013

Major Development Assessment
Department of Planning and Infrastructure
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

State-Significant Development Application SSD-5000: Vickery Coal Project

Please find attached the AAO submission in response to the Vickery Coal Project Environmental Impact Statement.

The AAO is not opposed to mining in the region but, as Australia's national observatory for optical astronomy, wishes to emphasise the potential threat posed by mining to the observing conditions at the key Siding Spring Observatory site, mostly in the form of light and dust pollution. Our submission discusses viable mitigation strategies and we hope that we can work with both mine operators and government planning to ensure a solution acceptable to all.

We note that mention is made of the mitigation of light-pollution in Appendix H of the Environmental Impact Statement. In more specific terms, we would request that the owner and operator of the mine meet the following conditions:

1. familiarisation of the above parties with the risks and threats of mining activity to astronomical and astrophysical research, including dust and light pollution and possibly seismic disturbance;
2. recognition of the potential of the Vickery Coal Project to generate these risks and threats for Siding Spring Observatory, located near Coonabarabran in the Warrumbungle Shire;
3. agreement to engage in formal consultation with the Australian National University and the Australian Astronomical Observatory regarding a mitigation program for the minimisation of these impacts;
4. implementation at the Vickery mine site of an approved mitigation program;
5. ongoing engagement with the ANU and AAO to monitor the efficacy of remedial measures, assess the impacts of any expansion of mining activity and explore the potential of new technologies to limit the detrimental effects of light and dust pollution;
6. adoption of effective light and dust minimisation measures at the Vickery mine, including Whitehaven Coal Limited providing suitable equipment for the monitoring of light and dust levels at both the mine site and at Siding Spring; and

7. observance of the proposed new State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) especially governing lighting developments and conditions of consent for mines within 200 km of Siding Spring.

The Observatory is keen to work with Whitehaven Coal Limited and State Planning to minimise any detrimental impact on the Observatory, and will make resources available to achieve that.

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Yours sincerely



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