

Philip Nevill  
Senior Environmental Assessment Officer  
Department of Planning, Industry & Environment

Via: Major Projects Portal

Dear Mr Nevill

**Re. Narrabri Underground Mine Stage 3 Extension Project (SSD-10269)**

I refer to your request of 29 October 2020 for advice regarding the Narrabri Underground Mine Stage 3 Extension. The Resources Regulator has reviewed the request.

**Assessment**

*Mine Rehabilitation*

Additional information is required to assess the suitability of geomorphic design principles for the final landform of the Reject Emplacement Area (REA).

As outlined in the letter from the Resources Regulator to DPIE dated 12 April 2019 regarding its Secretary Environmental Assessment Requirements for the Narrabri Underground Mine Stage 3 Extension Project (in Appendix 1 of the Stage 3 EIS), the Regulator specified a requirement to evaluate geomorphological landform design characteristics. It is noted that the EIS does not include an evaluation of this issue, specifically in respect to the existing REA that is proposed to be utilised until the end of the mine life in 2044.

Section A5.2.2 of Attachment 5 (Rehabilitation & Mine Closure) of the Stage 3 EIS describes a conventional final landform design for the REA with limited detail in regard to final surface water drainage. Whilst this section of the EIS references the ATC Williams 2019 review of the REA, which indicates the emplacement design has a very low risk of global batter failure or displacement, further information is required to assess the adequacy of the design for long term stability associated with erosion impacts. This is required to determine its capability to support the final land use outcome of pasture for light grazing. As part of the assessment, an evaluation should be provided as to the feasibility of adopting an alternative geomorphic final landform design.

*Subsidence*

Surface features are likely to experience the full range of subsidence movements expected due to the supercritical nature of the mine layout. Noting this, the nature of the site is largely the same as that of the existing approved project and therefore the overall risk profile is similar.

However, it should be noted that three dwellings and associated sheds are situated over the proposed mining, two of these are owned by the mine operator and a third is privately owned. The mine operator has proposed ensuring that these dwellings are vacant when affected by subsidence as the primary risk control. It is not clear whether the privately-owned

dwelling is currently occupied or not, although the EIS does state that its construction is incomplete at this stage.

It is important that the mine operator ensures that the proposed risk management strategy for the privately-owned dwelling is feasible if required, i.e. vacation of the property in question prior to subsidence impacts.

### **Limitations**

It should be noted that the Resources Regulator does not provide any endorsement of the proposed rehabilitation methodologies presented in the proposal. Under the conditions of a mining authority granted under the *Mining Act 1992*, the Resources Regulator requires an authority holder to adopt a risk-based approach to achieving the required rehabilitation outcomes.

The applicability of the controls to achieve effective and sustainable rehabilitation is to be determined based on site-specific risk assessments conducted by the authority holder. An authority holder may also be directed by the Resources Regulator to implement further risk control measures required to achieve effective rehabilitation outcomes during the life of the mine.

### **Regulatory requirements if approved**

Further investigation will be required post-approval under the *Mining Act 1992* as part of the requirement to prepare a Rehabilitation Management Plan (currently covered by the Mining Operations Plan). Confirmation of the capping requirements for the REA will be necessary to ensure that the integrity of the cap is capable of sustaining grazing as well as natural tree growth post closure whilst ensuring that the reject material remains encapsulated in the long term.

The Resources Regulator will also undertake assessments of the mine operators' proposed mining activities under clause 33 of the Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Regulation 2014 as well as other WHS regulatory obligations.

### **Background**

The Mining Act Inspectorate within the Resources Regulator has responsibility for providing strategic advice on environmental issues as they relate to or affect mine rehabilitation.

The Mine Safety Inspectorate within the Resources Regulator is responsible for ensuring the mine operators' compliance with the Work Health and Safety (WHS) legislation, in particular the effective management of risks associated with the principal hazards as specified in the *Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Regulation 2014*.

### **Contact**

Should you require any further information or clarification, please contact the Office of the Executive Director ([ED.ResourcesRegulator@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ED.ResourcesRegulator@planning.nsw.gov.au))

Yours sincerely,



**Anthony Keon**  
**Executive Director**  
**Resources Regulator**  
2 December 2020