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Planning and Assessment Division
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Returned via Major Projects Portal

Attention: Gabrielle Allan

16 April 2021

Dear Ms Allan

Bobs Farm Sand Mine Project – SSD 6395

Thank you for the request for advice from Public Authority Consultation (PAE-14928719), requesting the review by the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) of the Response to Submissions – (RtS), for the proposed Bobs Farm Sand Mine Project (Application SSD 6395) at Bobs Farm, in the Port Stephens Council Local Government area.

Risk to Groundwater Quality

The EPA provided a response to the Request for Comments and Recommended Conditions of Consent on 1 February 2019 (EPA Ref Doc18/900871-20), in which the EPA advised that it could not recommend conditions for the proposed development in its current form because of the significant risk to water quality posed by sand extraction below the maximum predicted groundwater level.

The primary matters of concern were:

- The proposal sought approval to mine sand beneath the existing water table, which was inconsistent with all new sand mines in the area which have been required to only mine down to 0.7 metres of known groundwater height, with the finished ground level being reinstated to 1.0 metres above the maximum known ground water height.

- Extraction below the maximum predicted groundwater level risks oxidation of the extensive Potential Acid Sulfate Soils (PASS) and other minerals identified in the soil horizons within the coastal zones. PASS generates acidic soil and water impacts including liberation of metals. that

The additional information provided in the RtS response from the proponent has not provided any additional information to demonstrate that unmitigable impacts to groundwater will not occur due to the proposed mining. The EPA therefore maintains its position that the Sand Mine as proposed, in its present location, represents an unacceptable risk to groundwater quality.

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Additional Information on Noise

The EPA reviewed the Updated Noise Impact Assessment (UNIS) for the Bobs Farm Sand Mine prepared by Vipac Engineers and Scientists (Ref 70Q-18-0276-TRP-8551444-0 dated 8 November 2019). The UNIS was prepared in response to EPA's response. If the proponent chooses to continue with the application, it will need to address the following issues with the UNIS:

1. Table 4-2 of the UNIS shows a summary of current ambient noise levels. Both 'LA90' and 'RBL' are listed for each monitoring location. The proponent should clarify the meaning of the 'LA90' value for each time period, and how it is distinct from the RBL value.

2. At location N1 for the evening period, the RBL is 42 dBA, which is higher than both the daytime RBL of 35 dBA and the night-time RBL of 28 dBA. As the monitoring was carried out in October, and from the elevated noise level traces in the logger charts of Appendix B, The EPA considers the evening RBL may be influenced by seasonal fauna/insects and may be lower than this value during other times of the year.

   The proponent should adopt a RBL value of 35 dBA for the evening period at N1 (in line with the daytime RBL value, and in accordance with the guidance in Section 2.3 of the Noise Policy for Industry), or alternatively provide adequate justification and evidence that the evening RBL value at N1 was not influenced by noise from seasonal fauna.

3. Table 6-2 of the UNIS shows the type and quantity of noise sources used in the noise modelling process, together with their sound power levels (SWLs). The table lists a peak quantity of 200 32t Export Lorries, with an associated SWL of 100 dBA, which is presumably for a single truck. Section 6.3 states that the site will generate 200 truck movements per day during peak periods (and Table 6-4 shows daily movements for each phase). However, it is unclear how many of these daily truck movements have been included in the noise modelling, which relates to noise generated over a 15 minute period.

   The proponent should clearly detail the type and quantity of items modelled on the proposed site for each phase of operations. The position of each modelled source on the site should also be clearly marked and identified.

4. The predicted noise impacts from proposed operations shown in Tables in Sections 7.1 and 7.3 show significantly different noise levels during the daytime, evening and night-time periods. This suggests that different items of plant and equipment have been modelled in these scenarios. However, the UNIS only shows equipment lists per phase in Table 6-2.

   The proponent should clearly show the type and quantity of all noise sources modelled during the daytime, evening and night-time periods for each phase of operation.

If you have any questions about this matter, please contact Genevieve Lorang on (02) 4908 6869 or via email at hunter.region@epa.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Mitchell Bennett
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