



Media Release

Bickham Response to Draft Strategic Assessment on Coal Mining in Upper Hunter

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The proponent of an open-cut coal mine in the Upper Hunter has urged the state government to set aside the findings of a Draft Strategic Assessment Report on coal mining in the area.

In its response to the report, lodged last week, Bickham Coal asks that the Environmental Impact Statement process for the project begin "as soon as possible".

The company's response to the Draft Strategic Assessment (conducted by Howard Reed of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources) argues that "information provided in the report is not substantiated by rigorous technical analysis or quantified data." These shortcomings, the company says "undermine the credibility and usefulness of the document".

As an example, the company referred to the attempt in the Draft Report to model the salinity impact of a new mine in the Upper Hunter using data from seven mines in the Lower Hunter.

A company spokesman said it was like using temperature data from Cairns to predict weather in Hobart! "It would have been far more relevant to use information from similar low salinity areas like Ulan or Lithgow."

The report's recommendations, says Bickham Coal, are "either routinely adopted" in current EIS processes, "represent current best practice or are more appropriately dealt with as conditions of approval for specific projects."

David Foster, Director of Bickham Coal, said the recommendations are impractical, ill-conceived, and unnecessary.

"They would create a two-step approval process, with no demonstrable benefit to the community, the proponent or the environment."

Foster says this is clearly out of step with two key objectives of the planning reforms undertaken by the state government - to simplify planning controls and improve development assessment processes.

"The outcomes outlined in the Draft Strategic Assessment Report can be achieved by including the obligation to provide a Water Resource Assessment and Water Management Plan (with independent review) in the EIS requirements set down by the Director-General of DIPNR. The studies would then be undertaken concurrently with the EIS."

"The environmental outcomes would be exactly the same, but without the lengthy delay and uncertainty for both community and proponent."

ENDS

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