

## Advice to decision maker on coal mining project

### Proposed action: Coal Mine

<b>Requesting agency</b>	Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
<b>Date of request</b>	13 June 2012
<b>Project title</b>	<b>FOXLEIGH COAL MINE EXTENSION, MIDDLEMOUNT, QUEENSLAND, (EPBC 2010/5421)</b>
<b>Summary of request</b>	<p>The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the department) is currently assessing the Foxleigh coal mine extension project (2010/5421) in accordance with the provisions of the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>.</p> <p>The department advises the Interim Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Coal Mining (the committee) of an opportunity to comment on a draft environmental impact statement. Specifically, the department seeks the advice of the committee on whether:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the proposed design and operation measures are considered adequate to assess downstream impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat features</li> <li>2. the impacts of the proposed action are likely to adversely affect matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES), in particular, the Squatter Pigeon (<i>Geophaps scripta scripta</i>); and</li> <li>3. the project proposal includes sufficient measures to mitigate impacts to other MNES downstream of the action.</li> </ol> <p>The department requests advice by 25 July 2012.</p>

#### Advice

- 1) The committee notes the scale of the proposed Foxleigh coal mine extension and that there are a number of other operating mines in the region, including the Oak Park Mine, Oaky Creek Mine, German Creek Mine, Lake Lindsay Mine and Middlemount Mine.
- 2) In terms of the specific advice requested, the committee notes:
  - a) the environmental impact statement does not quantify risks of impacts from the mining activities to riparian habitat downstream of the proposed action. However, the diversion of Cockatoo Creek, the erosion of overburden for the construction of levees and cumulative impacts may adversely affect downstream water quality. As a result, species which are sensitive to turbidity may be adversely impacted. Regarding the proposed stream diversion, an appropriate expert should be consulted for mitigation measures to reduce the predicted stream power and erosion potential. In particular, the committee is concerned with sediment loads in the Fitzroy catchment.
  - b) Although not discussed, the proposal may impact the Squatter Pigeon (*G. scripta scripta*) through changes to the riparian habitat. However, without a thorough assessment, it is difficult to

quantify the scale of impacts. In addition, there may be potential cumulative impacts associated with a reduction in potential Ornamental snake (*Denisonia maculata*) habitat as part of the proposed Middlemount extension project.

- c) in general, impacts to all relevant matters of national environmental significance were not considered as part of the environmental impact statement. Thus, it is not possible to make an adequate assessment of proposed mitigation measures, noting that this proposal is for the extension of an operating mine. For example, further mitigation measures such as strategic offset areas, may be required to address cumulative impacts as several other mines operate in the region.
- 3) Overall, the committee notes that the cumulative surface water and groundwater impacts in the region are unknown. In general, there is a high level of uncertainty surrounding surface water and groundwater impacts.
- 4) The committee suggests that as this proposal is at a draft environmental impact statement assessment stage, future documentation should include information relating to an assessment of regional cumulative impacts (covering a site and regional water balance; solute balance; surface water, groundwater, acid water drainage, geomorphological, hydrological, ecological impacts; proposed monitoring program, and noting erosion at adjacent mines). The further information then needs to be adequately assessed and appropriately influence the conditioning and management of the project development phases.
- 5) The committee notes the uncertainties, transparency and assumption issues (particularly regarding the syncline nature of the region) regarding the groundwater model, and suggests that an appropriate groundwater field monitoring program is required to constrain and validate the groundwater model.

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**Date of  
advice**

31 July 2012

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