What is a Preliminary Environmental Assessment?

Mining developments in NSW are assessed and determined under the State Significant Development (SSD) provisions of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (Act). Essentially, this means that the NSW Government will determine Hume Coal’s development application (DA) and not local government. When lodging a DA, under section 26a, the Act requires that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is lodged in support of the DA.

Before a DA is lodged, mining projects, like the Hume Coal Project are required to apply to the Department of Planning and Environment (DP&E) for the Secretary’s Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) prior to preparing an EIS. An application to receive SEARs from the secretary is formally made by preparing a Preliminary Environmental Assessment (PEA). The PEA provides an overview of the project and gives the opportunity for proponents like Hume Coal to consult with both Government and the community before lodging their DA. This will help to identify any issues raised during this consultation and explain how these issues have been addressed in the EIS.

In practice, the PEA provides an overview of the proposed activity and the potential environmental impacts to a range of stakeholders. The DP&E, government agencies, Wingecarribee Shire Council and the local community are informed of the activity and are in turn provided the opportunity to provide input into the SEARs.

Following receipt of the SEARs, Hume Coal will demonstrate compliance with both the SEARs and appropriate guidelines when preparing the EIS. The EIS will be prepared for lodgement in late 2016 and will accompany the projects DA.

Hume Coal submitted two PEAs on 17 July 2015 and received SEARs for the project on 26 August 2015.

Why did Hume Coal submit two Preliminary Environmental Assessments?

Hume Coal is seeking approval for two separate activities. The first application is the Hume Coal Project which includes application for an underground coal mine and surface infrastructure. The second application is the Berrima rail project which comprises of the rail line from the rail loop to the Berrima Branch line so as to transport coal to the Berrima Cement works and otherwise to domestic and international markets via Port Kembla.

Site Verification Certificate

Under the provisions of the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000, either a Gateway Certificate or a Site Verification Certificate (SVC) is required before the projects development application (DA) can be lodged. This process was established by the NSW Government (2012a) Strategic Regional Land Use Policy (SRLUP) which is an amendment to the State Environmental Planning Policy (Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries) 2007 (Mining SEPP) in 2013.

Detailed surveys and analysis (site verification) has been completed and determined that no land within Hume Coal’s proposed mining lease area is Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land (BSAL) therefore, Hume Coal made application to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DP&E) for an SVC to certify this finding.

Hume Coal was subsequently issued with a Site Verification Certificate on 22 April 2016 for the Hume Coal Project.

There is no requirement to lodge an SVC application for the Berrima rail project, because it does not require a mining lease and is therefore exempt from this requirement.