

Exploration Licence Application 6415 (Act 1992) Summary and response to public comments

Departmental consideration of public comments received

The Department of Regional NSW, Mining Exploration and Geoscience (MEG) is responsible for assessing applications for exploration licences (ELAs) under the *Mining Act 1992*.

The assessment process for ELAs for Group 9 (coal) minerals made under the [Operational Allocation Framework](#) considers relevant provisions of the Mining Act 1992 (and associated Regulations) and the [Operational Allocation Guidelines](#), this incorporates an assessment of geological, environmental, fit and proper person requirements, potential resource and mine design consideration, and community matters.

Exploration Licence Application 6415

Wilpinjong Coal Pty Limited, made an application for an exploration licence for Group 9 minerals for operational allocation purposes (ELA6415) on 17 December 2021 and advertised the application in the Mudgee Guardian on 21 January 2022 and in The Land on 27 January 2022.

The public was invited to provide submissions of issues that should be taken into consideration in the assessment and determination of the application and the conditions to be applied to the licence (should it be granted). The public comment process for coal and petroleum exploration titles is explained in further detail at this [link](#).

395 public comments were received during the submission period for ELA6415 and, in accordance with the operational allocation guidelines, the applicant was given the opportunity to respond to the issues raised.

The public comments received focused on the potential impact on the local community, environmental and ecological concerns, Aboriginal cultural heritage and concerns regarding emissions and climate change.

The public comment process for the exploration of coal and petroleum, including coal seam gas, stipulates that MEG *may* publish a summary of issues raised and its response to public submissions received for exploration licence applications. MEG *may* also publish the Applicants response to submissions.

MEG and applicant response

A summary of issues raised in public submissions is set out at Table 1 below.

The [applicant's response to the public submissions](#) is now publicly available on our [Public comment on new coal and petroleum titles](#) webpage.

In consideration of issues raised in public submissions and the resultant recommendation to the decision maker, MEG applied greater weight to issues raised regarding the impacts of *exploration activities* rather than the impacts of *mining*. The grant of an exploration licence does not give approval for mining and, should the applicant progress to a mining proposal in the future, further approvals and public consultation is required under Planning approval regimes.

The assessment of MEG found that the matters raised by the public in relation to exploration activities will be adequately addressed by:

- the requirement for further activity approvals from the NSW Resources Regulator before surface disturbing activities. These approvals will consider and manage environmental and rehabilitation issues
- the standard exploration licence conditions which include conditions to protect the environment
- the holding of a security deposit and the requirement for rehabilitation of any disturbance
- the legislated requirement for any holder to have a land access agreement with all landholders before entering their property
- the provisions of the Mining Act 1992 and other relevant legislation.

The public comments and the applicant's response were considered by the decision-maker before determining to grant ELA6415 on 3 May 2022, with standard exploration licence conditions and three special conditions for operational allocation exploration licences applied. The Instrument of Grant can be found [here](#).

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Regional
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Table 1: Summary of issues raised in public submissions on ELA6415

	Common theme	Specific matters raised
1	Proximity to the village of Wollar and impact on the residents' amenity and views	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• proximity and visibility of drill rigs close to the township• mental health impacts such as stress and anxiety which may occur due to the potential threat of mining• the loss of a peaceful lifestyle and the loss of scenic tourism business• contributes to the depopulation of the area and the loss of shops and services
2	Use of public roads to transport drilling rigs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• safety of locals on surrounding roads• cumulative impact on state of the roads along with current mining traffic and other projects in the area
3	Issues for affected landholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• access agreements, access through locked gates, disturbance of cattle grazing
4	Environmental issues including the need for construction of access roads to drilling sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• vegetation clearing and/or damage for vehicular access to drill pad areas• the need for appropriate rehabilitation of the borehole and surrounding area
5	Impact on agricultural land and bushland	
6	Impact on Aboriginal cultural heritage in the area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• there are significant Aboriginal cultural heritage sites in the Wollar area including artwork, ochre quarries, scar trees and artefact scatters

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	Common theme	Specific matters raised
7	Impact on significant and endangered flora and fauna ecological communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the region is a core habitat of the critically endangered ecological community known as Grassy Box Gum Woodlands• the area is part of the Mudgee-Wollar Important Bird Area, listed as internationally significant• a large number of threatened bird species have been found in the area including the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater• impacts on threatened bat species within the application area• possible loss of important wildlife corridors between Goulburn River National Park and Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve
8	Impact on koalas and their habitat	
9	Impact on Wollar and Wilpinjong creeks and other aquifers	
10	Impact on access and amenity to Goulburn River National Park	
11	Contribution of coal mining to climate change and counter to the NSW Govt commitments to lower emissions	
12	Impacts of dust, noise and road deterioration from current operations which could escalate in the new area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• potential impacts on the health of the local residents

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