

Bulga Coal Management Pty Limited

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**Statement of Environmental Effects  
Coal Handling and Processing  
Plant - Increased Throughput**

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September 2006



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Bulga Complex is located approximately 12 kilometres south-west of Singleton, 1 kilometre north of Broke and 1.5 kilometres east of Bulga, in the Upper Hunter Valley of New South Wales (**Figure 1.1**).

Bulga Complex is managed by Bulga Coal Management Pty Limited (BCM) on behalf of the Bulga Joint Venture (BJV) and currently comprises two coal mining operations: Bulga Underground Mine, incorporating the Beltana No. 1 Underground Mine, and the Bulga Open Cut Mine (BOC). Each operation is managed as a separate business unit and is serviced by a common coal handling and preparation plant (CHPP) and rail loading facility located in the north-east corner of the Bulga Complex (**Figure 1.2**).

To maximise the opportunities presented as a result of increased efficiencies at the existing coal handling and processing plant (CHPP), BCM propose to increase throughput of the CHPP from 15 to 20 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa).

BCM seek to modify the Bulga Underground development consent (DA 376-8-2003) under Section 96(1A) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act) to increase the throughput at the CHPP. This Statement of Environmental Effects (SEE) has been prepared by Umwelt (Australia) Pty Limited (Umwelt) on behalf of BCM to meet the requirements of Section 96(1A) of the EP&A Act. This SEE includes a description of the proposal, identifies the relevant statutory planning instruments and provides an assessment of the potential environmental impacts of the proposal.

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

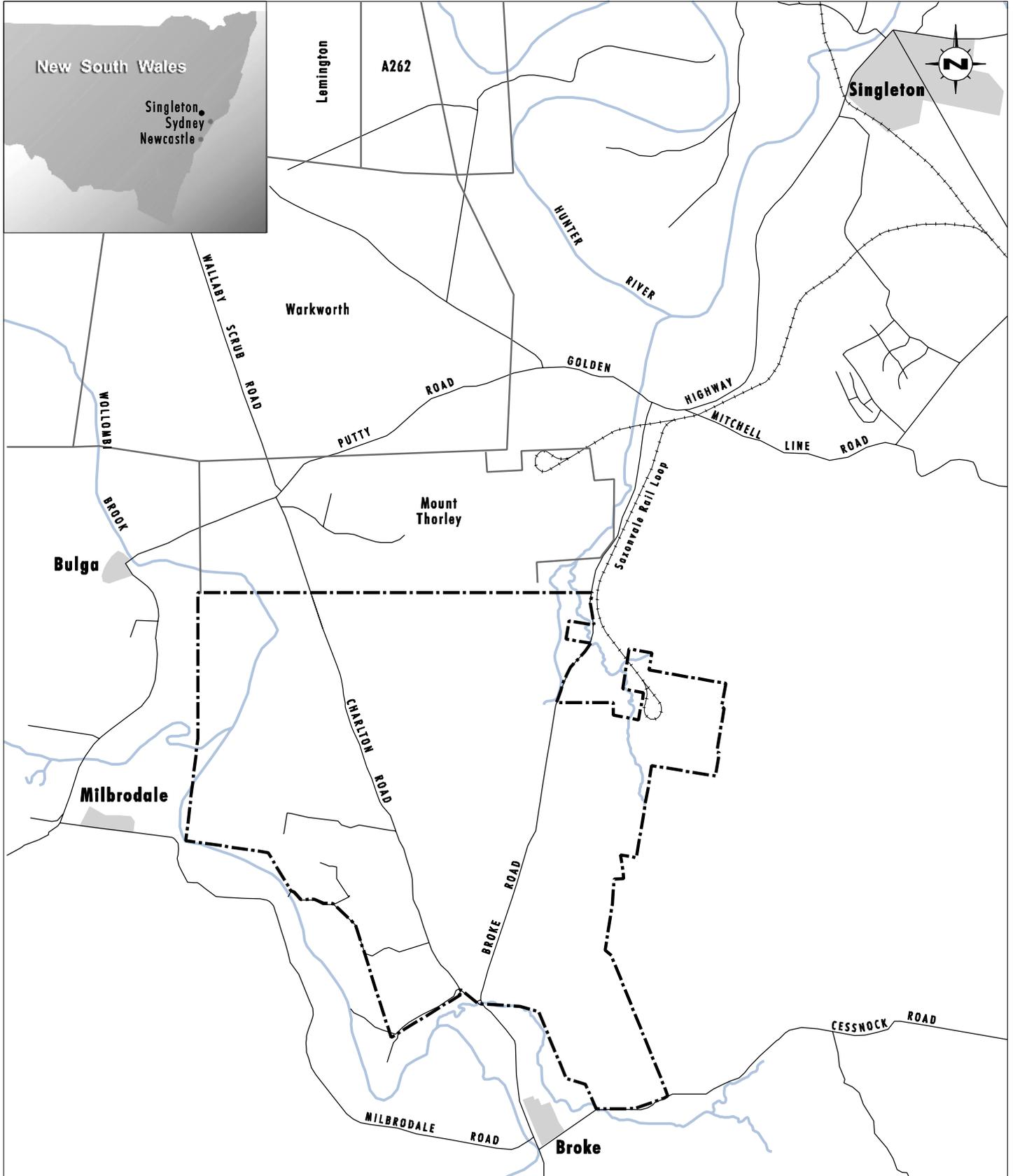
#### 1.1.1 Approval History

On 23 February 2004 BCM was granted development consent (DA 376-8-2003) for continued underground mining operations in the Whybrow, Blakefield, Glen Munro and Woodlands Hill coal seams, producing up to 14 Mt of run-of-mine (ROM) coal annually. The approval allowed for the processing of a maximum of 15 Mt of ROM coal per annum from the Bulga Complex (which includes both open cut and underground operations). The consent also allowed for the construction of a range of associated infrastructure and the upgrading of some of the existing infrastructure.

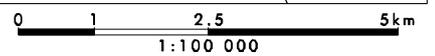
#### 1.1.2 Approval Process and Authority Consultation

Approval under the EP&A Act is required to increase the throughput of the Bulga CHPP. Approval to modify development consent DA 376-8-2003 is sought under Section 96(1A) of the EP&A Act to increase the throughput of the CHPP. A meeting was held with the Department of Planning (DoP) on 14 February 2006 to introduce and discuss the environmental requirements of the proposed Blakefield South Project. At that time increasing the throughput of the CHPP was included as part of the proposed Blakefield South Project. A letter was sent to DoP on 15 March 2006 requesting the Department's requirements for the Environmental Assessment (EA) of the Blakefield South Project. Correspondence received from DoP on 23 March 2006 confirmed the approvals path and provided the Department's requirements for the EA (see **Appendix 1**).

Subsequently, there have been delays to the Blakefield South Project that have resulted in the need to submit a Section 96 application for the increase to the CHPP throughput, prior to the application for the Blakefield South Project. BCM consulted with DoP regarding the increased CHPP throughput, and confirmed that a Section 96(1) application was appropriate for this project.



Base Map Source: 1:100 000 Cessnock Topographic Map



**Legend**

- Bulga Underground Development Consent Boundary
- Other Coal Lease Boundary
- Road
- + + Railway
- Watercourse

**FIGURE 1.1**  
**Locality Plan**



Base Source: Bulga Coal Management & hatch Aerial Photo (2003)

0 1 2 2.5 km  
1:55 000

**Legend**

-  Development Consent Boundary
-  Approved Underground Mining Area

**FIGURE 1.2**  
**Aerial View of Existing Operations**

Given that this project was formerly part of the Blakefield South Project there are aspects of the government agency requirements that are relevant to increasing the throughput of the CHPP. These are provided in **Table 1.1** together with reference to the sections in this SEE where each issue is addressed.

**Table 1.1 - Authority Requirements for SEE**

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>SEE Section No.</b>
<b>Description of the Proposal:</b> Describe the proposed modification in detail, clearly identifying the proposed site, the proposed works, the proposed intensity of operations, and the likely inter-relationship between the proposed operations and the existing or approved mining operations in the Bulga Mine.	2.2
<b>Justification for the Proposal:</b> Provide a justification for the proposed modification, including a clear description of the need for the proposed modification.	2.3
<b>Statutory Instruments:</b> Assess the proposed modification against any relevant statutory provisions.	3.0
<b>Key Issues:</b> Assess the following potential impacts of the proposed modification and describe what measures would be implemented to manage, mitigate or off-set these potential impacts:	
- surface water;	4.1
- noise (including off-site rail noise);	4.2
- air quality;	4.3
- flora and fauna (including any additional impacts on critical habitat, threatened species, populations, ecological communities and native vegetation);	4.4
- heritage (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal);	4.5
- visual amenity; and	4.6
- traffic and transport.	4.7

Other agencies consulted in relation to the Blakefield South Project (including the increased throughput of the CHPP) were the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and the Singleton Shire Council (SSC). On 17 March 2006 correspondence was provided to these authorities providing a briefing on the project, requesting any specific requirements for the EA and offering a meeting to discuss the project. No specific requirements were identified by the above authorities at this stage of the project and no meetings were requested.

## **2.0 EXISTING OPERATIONS AND PROPOSED MODIFICATION**

### **2.1 EXISTING CHPP**

Coal from the Bulga Complex is washed, screened, rinsed, crushed and dewatered in the CHPP, located in the north-east corner of the Bulga Complex (see **Figure 1.2**). The CHPP can produce two streams of product coal: semi-soft coking coal and thermal coal. In accordance with Schedule 3, Condition 7 of DA 376-8-2003, the existing CHPP has approval to process up to 15 Mtpa of ROM coal, 24 hours per day, seven days per week. During 2005 the CHPP processed approximately 13.98 Mt of coal.

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## **2.2 PROPOSED MODIFICATION TO CONSENT**

It is proposed to increase the throughput of the Bulga CHPP from the currently approved throughput of 15 Mtpa to 20 Mtpa to maximise the opportunities presented as a result of increased efficiencies achievable at the CHPP. The increase in throughput can be achieved through improved processes within the CHPP and will not require substantial upgrades or any external modifications to the CHPP. It is not proposed to increase the capacity of the current product coal stockpile area. The increased throughput of coal will require an increase to the peak daily number of trains from 9 to 12.

Increased CHPP throughput capacity will not impact on the total required tailings emplacement volume. The total tailings emplacement requirements are accounted for in the Bulga Complex emplacement strategy. With minor upgrades, the current emplacement system will have the throughput capacity to dispose of the tailings produced by washing 20 Mt ROM coal per year. Installation of a tailings flocculating system maximises the amount of water reclaimed from coal tailings and increasing emplaced densities.

## **2.3 PROJECT JUSTIFICATION**

The approved Open Cut and Underground Operations production limits are 12.2 Mtpa and 14 Mtpa respectively. A strong focus on improving mining practices has enabled both the Open Cut and Underground Operations to become more efficient. This has enabled both operations to achieve industry best practice production rates. In particular, the Underground Operation is setting new benchmarks for longwall productivity in Australia, mining 1 Mt of coal in November 2005 with a total of 7 Mt mined for the 2005 calendar year.

The combined mining capacity of the Open Cut (8-9 Mtpa ROM coal) and Underground Operations (up to 14 Mtpa ROM coal) now exceeds the approved CHPP ROM coal throughput (15 Mtpa). The Beltana No. 1 Whybrow mine is scheduled to be completed in late 2009 at which time it is planned to purchase a new 400 metre wide longwall machine which has the potential to mine up to 10 Mt of coal per annum.

The Bulga Complex mine plan has both the Open Cut Operation and a single longwall operation operating until approximately 2017. Subsequent to this time it is anticipated that the Open Cut Operation will scale back and a second longwall operation would commence.

## **3.0 RELEVANT STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS**

An assessment of the proposal against relevant statutory planning instruments is provided below.

### **3.1 COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATION**

#### **3.1.1 Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999**

The proposed increase of throughput will not require substantial upgrades or any external modifications to the existing approved CHPP and will therefore not impact on any matters of national environmental significance prescribed by the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Consequently, approval from the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment is not required for this proposal.

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## **3.2 NEW SOUTH WALES LEGISLATION**

### **3.2.1 Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979**

A section 96(1A) modification of consent can be obtained under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act) if the proposed modification is of minimal environmental impact, and the development to which the consent as modified relates is substantially the same development as the development for which the consent was originally granted. As discussed in **Section 4.0**, the proposed increased throughput of the CHPP is considered to be a modification causing minimal environmental impact. Consequently, given that the project is substantially the same as the original consent, approval for the increase is sought under section 96(1A) of the EP&A Act.

### **3.2.2 Radiation Control Act 1990**

BCM currently holds a licence under the *Radiation Control Act 1990* for the density gauges used in the CHPP. This licence will be maintained for the operational life of the CHPP.

### **3.2.3 Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997**

Coal mining is a scheduled activity under the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*, BCM are therefore required to hold an environmental protection licence.

BCM currently holds an environmental protection licence (No. 000563) that covers coal processing and coal production in excess of 5 Mt. Therefore, there is no requirement to modify the licence for this project.

### **3.2.4 Water Management Act 2000**

The licensing and approval provisions of the *Water Management Act 2000* do not currently apply to the Bulga area (at the time of SEE preparation); therefore the relevant provisions of the *Water Act 1912* continue to apply.

#### **3.2.4.1 Water Act 1912**

BCM currently holds licences with DNR to extract water from the Hunter River, to dewater underground workings and for groundwater monitoring purposes. Additional water licences are not currently required for the proposed increase to CHPP production.

### **3.2.5 National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974**

No external modifications are required to the CHPP; therefore, there will be no new land disturbance associated with the project and consequently no permits will be required under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.

### **3.2.6 Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995**

No external modifications are required to the CHPP; therefore, there will be no new land disturbance associated with the project and consequently no permits will be required under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*.

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### 3.2.7 Heritage Act 1977

No external modifications are required to the CHPP; therefore, there will be no new land disturbance associated with the project and consequently no permits will be required under the *Heritage Act 1977*.

## 3.3 STATE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING POLICIES

### 3.3.1 State Environmental Planning Policy 11 – Traffic Generating Development

No additional road traffic will be generated as a result of increased throughput of the CHPP. Therefore there is no requirement to refer this development to the RTA.

## 4.0 ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

### 4.1 SURFACE WATER

A detailed water balance was developed for the Bulga Underground mine as part of studies completed for the Bulga Coal Continued Underground Operations EIS (Umwelt 2003) and is contained in **Table 4.1**.

**Table 4.1 - Predicted Water Balance from Bulga Coal Continued Underground Operations EIS**

Scenario	Water Balance (ML/year)				
	Year 1	Year 8	Year 13	Year 21	Year 27
Dry Year (10%)	-914	-228	574	675	389
Average Year (50%)	-71	477	1285	1166	879
Wet Year (90%)	819	1220	2032	1780	1493

This water balance has been reviewed annually since 2004 during the Annual Environmental Management Reporting process. The most recent review of the water balance conducted during 2005 demonstrated that the water balance reported in the EIS is consistent with actual water movements and storage on site.

The increase in coal washing associated with the proposed increase in capacity of the CHPP from 15 Mtpa to 20 Mtpa will require an additional 550 ML (110 L/t) of water supply per year. There is sufficient water supply within the Bulga Complex water management system to accommodate this additional demand for most years and most weather conditions. The use of additional water for coal washing will reduce the need for BCM to discharge water under the Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme. BCM is currently also investigating other options for water sharing across Xstrata Coal NSW sites, to address water supply needs in the dry years where a water deficit exists.

### 4.2 NOISE

As the increase in throughput of the CHPP is to be achieved through increased efficiencies rather than major plant upgrades there will be no discernable increase in noise emissions from this operation. The increased throughput will however result in an increase in the peak number of train movements and the frequency of high train raling days for the Bulga Complex.

## 4.2.1 Rail Noise

A noise impact assessment was undertaken by Global Acoustics to determine the potential impact of additional rail movements due to the increased throughput of the CHPP. At the time of preparation of this SEE, the DEC was in the process of developing a new rail noise policy. The *Interim Guidelines for Applicants* (RIC & SRA 2003) were used to determine the noise criteria for this project. The Guidelines define noise level limits for living and sleeping areas as:

- $L_{Aeq(1hr)}$  40 and 35 dB for day (7 am to 10 pm) and night respectively with windows and doors closed; and
- $L_{Aeq(1hr)}$  50 and 45 dB for day and night respectively with windows and doors open.

As windows and doors provide more attenuation closed than opened, the limiting scenario is with them open. Internal noise levels are generally 10 dB less than external levels if the dwelling's windows are open approximately 20 per cent for ventilation (EPA 1999). Therefore the SRA criteria for external noise levels becomes  $L_{Aeq(1hr)}$  60 and 55 dB for day and night respectively.

Only one residence, residence 75 (refer to **Figure 4.1**), lies within proximity to the Saxonvale rail loop. Predicted rail noise levels for this residence (representing the worst case) are shown in **Table 4.2**. The predicted rail noise levels in **Table 4.2** are calculated based on the proposed peak number of 12 trains, or 24 rail movements, per day on the Saxonvale loop line.

**Table 4.2 - Predicted Rail Noise Levels for the Worst Case Residence**

	Predicted Noise Level		Criteria		Exceedances	
	Hourly $L_{Aeq}$ dB	$L_{Amax}$ dB	Hourly <sup>1</sup> $L_{Aeq}$ dB	$L_{Amax}$ dB	Hourly $L_{Aeq}$ dB	$L_{Amax}$ dB
Existing Rail Traffic	46	64	55	80	Nil	Nil
Proposed Rail Traffic	48	64	55	80	Nil	Nil

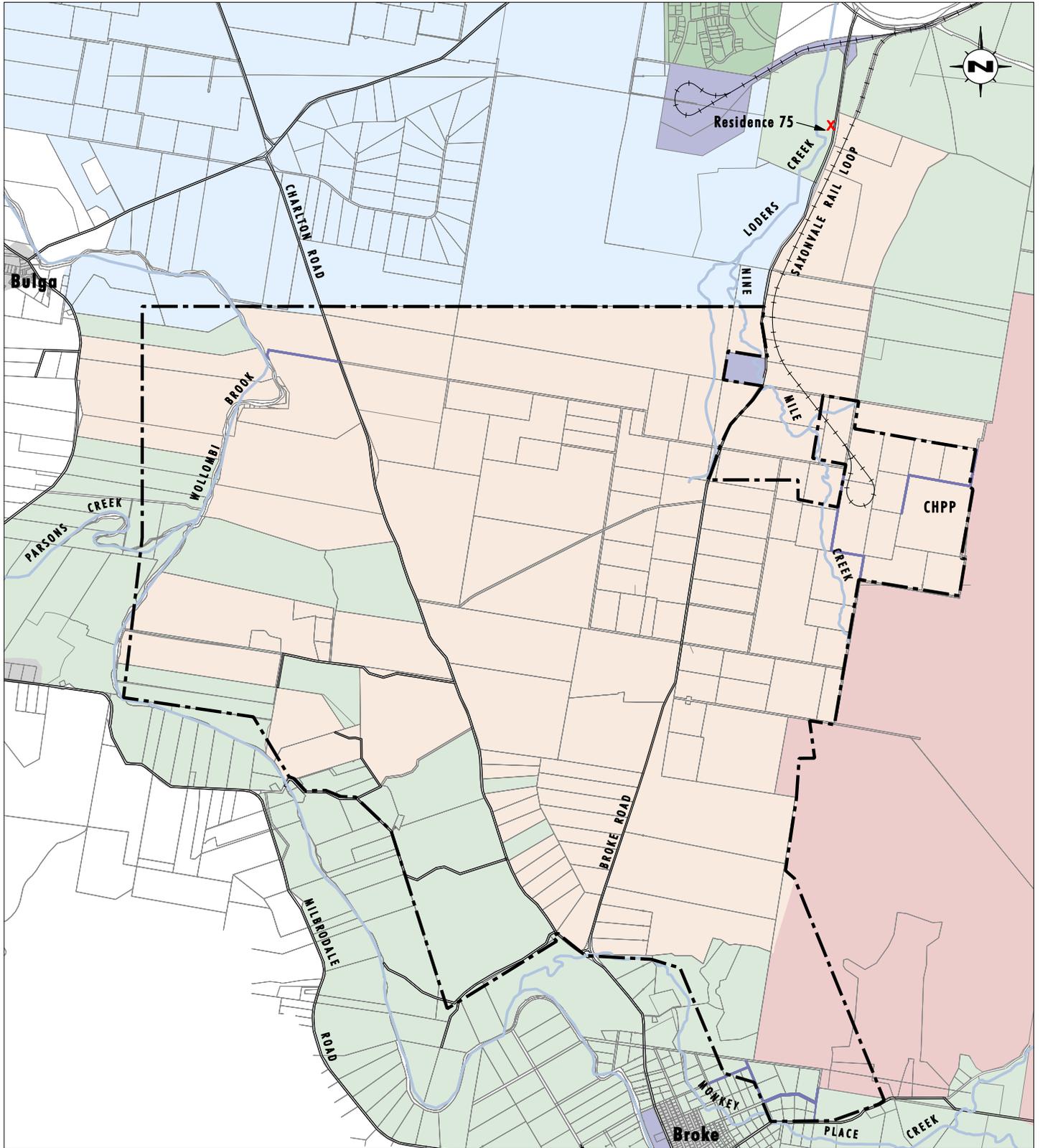
Note 1: Night time criterion shown as this is the limiting case.

The increase in train movements annually is predicted to result in an increase in the  $L_{Aeq}$  noise level of approximately 1.3 dB for residence 75 (worst case residence). A 1.3 dB increase in annual rail noise should not be discernible at residence 75, as people generally cannot detect changes of less than 2 dB. Other residences along the rail line to Newcastle will experience an increase in  $L_{Aeq}$  noise levels less than 1.3 dB and are also unlikely to notice a change in rail noise due to increased rail movements. Residence 75 has compulsory acquisition rights under DA 376-8-2003 due to predicted noise levels in the EIS (Umwelt 2003) but has not yet requested acquisition.

## 4.3 AIR QUALITY

An air quality assessment has been undertaken by Holmes Air Sciences for the broader Blakefield South Project. An assessment of the additional dust emissions due to the increased throughput of the CHPP and the subsequent increase of coal loaded to trains was undertaken as part of the broader Blakefield South Project assessment.

Bulga Coal Complex operates a comprehensive air quality monitoring system composed of 30 dust deposition gauges and nine high volume air sampler samplers. Monitoring of particulate matter



Base Source: Bulga Coal Management

0 1 2 3km  
1:65 000

**Legend**

- Development Consent Boundary
- Land Owned by Bulga Joint Venture
- Other Mine Owned Land
- Private Land
- Other Land
- Commonwealth Land (Singleton Army Training Area)
- Crown Land
- Mt Thorley Industrial Area
- Village Area
- X Residence 75
- Road
- Creek
- Cadastral

**FIGURE 4.1**

**Location of Residence 75**

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less than 10  $\mu\text{g}$  ( $\text{PM}_{10}$ ) concentrations during 2005 measured an average  $\text{PM}_{10}$  emission of approximately 18  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  (Umwelt 2005). This is well below the DEC long-term goal of 30  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . Monitoring of total suspended particulate matter (TSP) during 2005 measured an average TSP concentration of approximately 40  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  for the year, which is also well below the DEC annual average criterion of 90  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  (Umwelt 2005).

The additional TSP dust emission due to the increased capacity of the CHPP by 5 Mtpa is estimated to be 9600 kg/year. The increased rail loading emission due to the additional 5 Mtpa of ROM coal throughput at the CHPP is estimated to be 1600 kg/year.

In the Bulga Coal Continued Underground Operations EIS (Umwelt 2003) the worst case TSP emissions for the Bulga Complex (open cut and underground operations) were estimated to be a maximum of approximately 5,966,988 kg/year. The additional dust emission due to the increase of 5 Mtpa throughput of ROM coal at the CHPP and rail loading facility equates to an increase of approximately 0.19% of the maximum emission for the Bulga Complex. This is a very minor increase and in consideration of the existing background dust levels will not cause any exceedance of the relevant air quality goals.

#### **4.4 FLORA AND FAUNA**

As the proposal to increase throughput of the CHPP will not require any substantial external modifications, there will be no new land disturbance associated with the project and consequently flora and fauna will not be impacted by the proposal.

#### **4.5 HERITAGE**

No impacts on Indigenous or non-Indigenous sites or items will result from the proposal as no new land disturbance is required and the CHPP is located within an existing mining area.

#### **4.6 VISUAL**

Any modifications to the exterior of the CHPP will be minor in nature and would be of minimal visual impact as the CHPP is located within an area currently impacted by mining infrastructure.

#### **4.7 TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT**

No additional road traffic will be generated as a result of increased throughput of the CHPP.

The Bulga Coal Continued Underground Operations development consent (DA 376-8-2003) currently allows for a peak daily number of nine trains. The proposal will however require an increase in the peak daily number of train movements (from 9 to 12 trains per day) and the frequency of high raitling days, due to the increased throughput of coal. As discussed in **Section 4.2.1**, the increase in peak daily train movements is predicted to have a negligible impact on noise levels at residential receivers. The existing train loading facility has the capacity to load 20 Mtpa and will not require any substantial upgrades.

The Bulga rail loop joins the Whittingham to Mount Thorley rail spur, which was constructed under the *Whittingham to Mount Thorley Railway Act 1975*. The Act does not place any constraints on the carrying capacity of the line. The Australian Rail Track Corporation who are responsible for management of the network and the Hunter Valley Coal Chain Logistics Team who coordinate railings have determined that the Whittingham to Mount Thorley rail spur has the capacity to rail 20 trains per day (Dale Macklinshaw, ARTC Hunter Valley Operations Manager,

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pers. comm.). This equates to approximately 50 Mt of coal per year. The current combined approved railings transported on the Whittingham to Mount Thorley rail spur is approximately 34 Mtpa. Increasing the CHPP throughput from 15 Mtpa to 20 Mtpa of ROM coal would increase the railed coal from approximately 11 Mtpa to 15 Mtpa. Thus the increased railing (of approximately 4 Mtpa) would not exceed the predicted rail capacity.

## **5.0 REFERENCES**

Environment Protection Authority 1999. *Environmental Criteria for Road Traffic Noise*.

Rail Infrastructure Corporation and State Rail Authority 2003. *Interim Guidelines for Applicants*.

Umwelt (Australia) Pty Limited 2003. *Bulga Coal Continued Underground Operations Environmental Impact Statement*.

Umwelt (Australia) Pty Limited 2005. *Bulga Coal Complex Annual Environmental Management Report*.

# **APPENDIX 1**

## **Department of Planning Correspondence**



NSW GOVERNMENT  
**Department of Planning**

**Mining & Extractive Industries  
Major Development Assessment**

Phone: (02) 9228 6481  
Fax: (02) 9228 6466  
Email: [mike.young@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mike.young@planning.nsw.gov.au)  
Level 4 Western Gallery  
23-33 Bridge Street  
GPO Box 39  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

RECEIVED

29 MAR 2006

Ms Barbara Crossley  
Director  
Umwelt Environmental Consultants  
2/20 The Boulevard  
PO Box 838  
TORONTO NSW 2283

Dear Ms Crossley

**Application to Modify Bulga Coal Mine Development Consent (DA 376-8-2003)**

I refer to your letter, dated 15 March 2006, enquiring whether the proposed modification to the Bulga Coal Mine (DA 376-8-2003) can be considered under section 96(2) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act).

The Department has reviewed the information provided in your letter and agrees that the proposal can be considered under section 96(2) of the EP&A Act. This application should be accompanied by a Statement of Environmental Effects (SEE) that addresses the following matters:

- **Description of the Proposal:** Describe the proposed modification in detail, clearly identifying the proposed site, the proposed works, the proposed intensity of operations, and the likely inter-relationship between the proposed operations and the existing or approved mining operations at the Bulga Mine.
- **Justification for the Proposal.** Provide a justification for the proposed modification, including a clear description of the need for the proposed modification (including an outline of the operational, environmental, social and economic benefits).
- **Statutory Instruments:** Assess the proposed modification against any relevant statutory provisions.
- **Key Issues:** Assess the following potential impacts of the proposed modification during construction and operation, and describe what measures would be implemented to manage, mitigate, or off-set these potential impacts:
  - subsidence (including any additional impacts on private property, public infrastructure, public roads, surface and groundwater resources, flora & fauna and cultural artefacts);
  - surface and groundwater (including an updated site water balance);
  - noise (including off-site rail noise);
  - air quality (including a greenhouse gas assessment);
  - flora and fauna (including any additional impacts on critical habitat, threatened species, populations, ecological communities and native vegetation);
  - heritage (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal);
  - visual amenity; and
  - traffic and transport
- **Environmental Monitoring & Management:** Describe how the environmental performance of the modified operations would be monitored and managed over time, including consideration of how the changes to operations associated with the proposed modification would be integrated into the environmental monitoring and management of the existing and approved operations at Bulga Coal Mine.

**Consultation**

During the preparation of the SEE, you should consult with the relevant local and State government agencies (including the Department of Environment and Conservation, Department of Primary Industries, Department of Natural Resources and Singleton Council), and surrounding landowners/occupiers that are likely to be affected by the proposal.

The SEE must include a report indicating who was consulted, what consultation occurred, and what issues were raised in this consultation.

## Administration

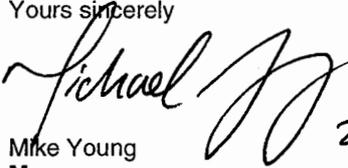
You should notify the Department at least 2 weeks before you lodge the application, so that it can make the necessary arrangements to exhibit the SEE. When you lodge the application, you must include:

- at least 20 hard copies of the SEE, and 15 copies of the SEE on CD-ROM;
- an electronic copy of the executive summary of the SEE; and
- a cheque for the modification fee (see clause 258 of the EP&A Regulation), made payable to the Department.

## Enquiries

If you have any enquiries about the above, please contact Fred Morgan on 9228 6431.

Yours sincerely

  
Mike Young  
Manager  
Mining & Extractive Industries

23/3/06

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