

## **Clarence Colliery – EPA’s Licence Review and Current Investigation**

Centennial Coal operates the Clarence Colliery underground coal mine near Lithgow. Centennial Coal holds an Environment Protection Licence (726) issued by the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) for its operations at the site. A [copy of the licence](#) is available via the public register on the EPA’s website.

The EPA is currently conducting a statutory review of the Environment Protection Licence for the Clarence Colliery as required under the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*. On 2 July 2015 a serious pollution incident occurred at the Clarence Colliery which impacted the surrounding environment.

Information on the review and the EPA’s response to the pollution incident are detailed below.

### **Clarence Colliery Licence review**

In September 2014 the EPA commenced a statutory [review](#) of the Environment Protection Licence for Clarence Colliery. EPA officers have been consulting with Centennial Coal, and key community and environmental stakeholders as part of the review process.

In response to a report on the water quality in the Wollangambe River undertaken by the University of Western Sydney and community concerns about the findings the EPA commissioned scientists from the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) to undertake a study (in October and November 2014) of the quality of the mine water discharge from the Clarence Colliery and the impacts on the Wollangambe River. This report - [‘Clarence Colliery Discharge Investigation’](#) - has confirmed that the mine discharge is impacting on the Wollangambe River. The report confirms the findings of the study undertaken by the University of Western Sydney in 2012-13,

In response to the report the EPA will be varying the company’s Environment Protection Licence to improve the quality of the discharge and reduce the impact on the river. Options for Centennial will be to either reduce the pollutants in the mine water discharge or if possible remove the discharge from the Wollangambe River. These options will be the subject of negotiations between the EPA and Centennial Coal. It is important to note that EPA will set the standards and outcomes in the licence to be achieved but the company will determine the actions that they need to implement to meet these.

The EPA is committed to improving the quality of the mine water discharge from Clarence Colliery, and working with key stakeholders to bring about changes to protect the Wollangambe River.

The EPA is aiming to have the licence negotiations finalised in the next few months. However, the EPA’s immediate priority is to focus on investigating a pollution incident that occurred on 2 July 2015. The investigation of this incident is separate to the licence review process that commenced last year.

### **Clarence Colliery pollution incident**

On the 2 July 2015 a spill occurred from a coal reject stockpile at the mine site that resulted in many tonnes of coal fines and coarse reject material, including coal rock and gravel being dispersed into the environment surrounding the mine site. Coal fines also entered the Wollangambe River within the World Heritage Area of the Greater Blue Mountains National Park.

Centennial Coal reported the incident to the EPA on the morning of 2 July 2015. The EPA inspected the site and commenced an investigation with an immediate focus on containing and cleaning up the spill. The EPA issued a Clean-up Notice to Centennial Coal on Friday 3 July 2015 which outlined the clean-up requirements of the impacted environment.

As directed by the Clean-up Notice the company installed 22 silt fences between the mine and the river to contain the material and prevent any further impact to the river. These fences are being maintained and inspected daily.

Centennial Coal has now removed coal material from over 350 metres of the drainage line from the river upslope towards the mine site as required by the EPA. The coarser coal material from the upper slopes area closest to the mine is also being removed.

The EPA's inspections have confirmed that coal fines, in varying quantities, settled in the river up to 8 kilometres downstream of the spill site.

Developing a method to remove the coal fines from the river required careful planning due to the difficult terrain and sensitive environment. The EPA required Centennial Coal to undertake trials to determine the best approach to cleaning up the river.

On 18 August 2015 the EPA issued a second Clean-up Notice to Centennial Coal which outlined the methods to be used for clean-up of the river. Specifically the notice requires the company to remove deposits of coal fines by hand or by using a small suction pump. Under the terms of the notice the clean up will continue until the EPA is satisfied.

Importantly, in-stream barriers are in place to limit any downstream movement of the coal fines and assist in the clean-up. The EPA is undertaking regular inspections to confirm the effectiveness of the clean-up.

The EPA and National Parks and Wildlife Service have had assistance from bushwalkers who have used their local knowledge to locate coal fines in sections of the Wollangambe River that are difficult to access.

## EPA Investigation

While the EPA's immediate focus has been on containment and clean-up, the EPA is also undertaking a thorough legal investigation into the incident.

EPA officers have been onsite regularly to inspect the incident site and the impacted area of the Wollangambe River.

The EPA is working closely with the NPWS to determine the extent of the distribution of coal fines within the Wollangambe River and is also receiving expert scientific advice about any potential environmental impacts.

The EPA's investigation involves gathering evidence to determine the circumstances surrounding the incident and any breaches of environmental legislation, before deciding what action to take.

The EPA has a suite of tools to regulate activities so the environment is protected. The EPA's regulatory decisions are guided by its [Compliance Policy](#) to ensure compliance activities and actions are consistent, fair and credible. The EPA [Prosecution Guidelines](#) set out the factors the EPA takes into account in deciding whether, how and in what court to prosecute offences under the legislation it administers.

## Further Information

A copy of Centennial Coal's Environment Protection Licence (726) for the Clarence Colliery, including a copy of the Clean-up Notice is available on the EPA website: [POEO Public Register search](#)

Information about the EPA's review of the Environment Protection Licence for Clarence Colliery along with a copy of the OEH report "Clarence Colliery Discharge Investigation" is available on the EPA website: [Licence variations – Clarence Colliery](#)

A copy of the EPA's Compliance Policy and Prosecution Guidelines are available on the EPA website: [POEO policies and guidelines](#)

If you have any questions concerning the licence review or the pollution incident you can contact the EPA Environment Line: phone 131 555 or email: [info@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@environment.nsw.gov.au)