

Maxwell Underground explains why it should be allowed to mine the former Drayton South site



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New mining methods, new type of coal, new approach that's the message contained in the 4600 pages of Maxwell Underground's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released today.

Maxwell Underground is hoping to gain approval to mine Exploration Licence 5460 located about 10 kilometres from Jerrys Plains.

The licence was once held by Anglo American, who spent five years (2012-2017) trying to gain planning approval for what they named the Drayton South Coal Project. Anglo wanted to develop an open cut mine adjacent to their existing Drayton mine.

The company released two mine designs and they were both rejected by the then NSW Planning and Assessment Commission due to their likely impact on the world renowned thoroughbred studs Coolmore and Godolphin (Woodlands) who neighbour EL5460.

Anglo spent tens of millions trying to get the project approved while the thoroughbred industry spent millions stopping the open cut. The whole process was condemned by both parties as causing community division and wasting resources.

Giving up on the project Anglo sold both their former Drayton open cut (closed in December 2016) and the EL 5460 to Malabar Coal in March 2018.

Now we are back to EL5460 but this time the owners Malabar Coal are hoping that by using underground extraction methods the mine will gain approval in what the company described as a 'brownfield' site.



Location of Underground Mine Entry Area

In their summary of the project's worth it states it will employ 350 full time workers when the mine reaches full capacity of producing 4.8 million tonnes of ROM coal/year. The mine is expected to produce 148m/t of coal over its 26 years lifespan and inject \$1billion into the economy.

Bord and pillar and longwall methods will be used to extract the coal which is described as being 70 per cent coking - steel making coal, whereas Drayton South only talked about thermal production like their neighbours BHP Billiton's Mr Arthur open cut.

Malabar Coal's chairman Wayne Seabrook said the underground operations would be targeting deeper seams that contained the coking coal and the product would be sold to Asian steel mills.

The company has recently appointed a mine manager James Johnson who has worked in the industry for a number of years and comes from the Hunter Valley.

On the major sticking point the impact on the thoroughbred studs the EIS contains various reports on how there will be negligible impacts as the mine entrance will be located 7km from the two studs.

The EIS says neither stud will not be able to see the mining operations - one of the reasons for the rejection of the open cut mine, because there will be little land disturbance and the view from the studs will be of grazing paddocks.

Air quality will not be an issue according to the proponents nor mining noise as it is an underground mine that will use the former Drayton mine infrastructure for coal handling and preparation.

On the question of water impacts the EIS once again states there will be minor impacts despite the fact the mine will be located adjacent to the Hunter River and Coolmore is one of the largest irrigators of pastures in the country.

Water will likely become a battleground for this project as the Hunter River is one of the only regulated rivers in the state that still has general security water allocations. This year the irrigators were given 95 per cent allocation whereas most of the rivers have less than 10 per cent or zero allocation.

Malabar has been busy according to the EIS undertaking long awaited rehabilitation of the Drayton site having completed 644 hectares to date. The site will be used for low intensity cattle grazing. There are also plans for the Maxwell Solar Project on the Drayton site to generate 25 megawatts of power.

Mr Seabrook said the company wanted to improve the agricultural country that it owns which would also enhance the overall appearance of the site.



Newly appointed mine manager James Johnson

"We have also decided to have all access through Thomas Mitchell Drive to minimise traffic on the Golden Highway," he said.

"Our aim is to ensure this project works well for everyone and given the coal resources available it has the potential to provide employment for decades."

Overall its an impressive EIS specifically designed to counter all the issues raised by the previous Planning and Assessment Commissions when they rejected an open cut development.

Malabar hope to be mining in 2021.