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MEDIA RELEASE

LONGWALL MINING ALREADY INCORPORATES HABITAT PROTECTION

The listing of longwall mining as a key threatening process by the NSW Scientific Committee is an unnecessary duplication of existing State Government planning and approval processes for subsidence management, the NSW Minerals Council said today.

NSWMC Chief Executive Officer, Dr Nikki Williams, said longwall mining in NSW is already subject to rigorous environmental assessment under the Integrated Development Approval procedures.

"In 2004 the NSW Government worked closely with the minerals industry to implement a Subsidence Management Planning (SMP) process. This process established a significant step up in reporting and management of subsidence from underground coal mines using longwall methods," Dr Williams said.

The SMP process is administered by the Department of Primary Industries – Mineral Resources (DPI-MR) but involves all key planning and environmental departments of government so that a whole-of-government position is transparently delivered on longwall mining approvals.

The requirement to develop and obtain approval for a SMP already covers the conditions specified by the Scientific Committee's listing of longwall mining as a key threatening process to habitat for endangered species. In practice, the listing will not change the already rigorous compliance process currently in place.

The SMP process also already requires comprehensive community consultation throughout its preparation and sets conditions for ongoing environmental performance monitoring and communication to government, the community and other interested stakeholders. A major focus of the SMP is the landscape and biodiversity impact assessment and mitigation/remediation measures associated with the longwall mining operation.

"The NSWMC, member companies and key minerals industry institutions have worked with dedication and commitment to ensure that the minerals industry in this State is at the forefront of innovative ways to minimise environmental impacts, with biodiversity protection a priority," Dr Williams said.

"The NSWMC acknowledges the existence of isolated cases of biophysical effects and impacts resulting from longwall mining subsidence. However, the significance of any impact on threatened species and sensitive environments have rarely, if ever, been of major significance. The main impacts are visual which are understandably important to local communities."

"While recognising the role and brief of the NSW Scientific Committee, the NSWMC considers the listing by the Scientific Committee an unnecessary duplication of measures that are already comprehensively addressed under the existing planning and approvals regime."

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