

2025 consultation

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WOLLAR PROGRESS ASSOCIATION

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Wednesday 25 June 2025

Submission Net Zero Commission Workplan 2025

Background

Wollar Progress Association (WPA) is the representative body of the Wollar community in Mid-Western Regional local government area. Our district is currently dominated by the impacts of coal mining but is also the home of the Wollar Solar Farm and the starting point for the approved Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWOREZ) through hosting the main new switching station that will connect the two new 500 kV transmission lines to the grid.

The Wollar district is a prime area to seriously commence the transition away from coal mining to a renewable energy economy.

WPA thanks the Net Zero Commission (NZC) for the opportunity to provide comment on the 2025 Work Plan aimed to provide a framework for activities to 2028.

We participated in the recent NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the NZC Annual Report 2024 and note the Joint Standing Committee Recommendation 2: regarding the use of NZC legislated functions to provide a further report on the resources sector, including methane abatement technology and fugitive emissions.

The Work Plan must give first priority to using functions under s15 1d) of *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023* (the Act) to provide a dedicated report on the risks posed by proposed coal expansions to NSW climate targets and outline the policy changes needed to address it.

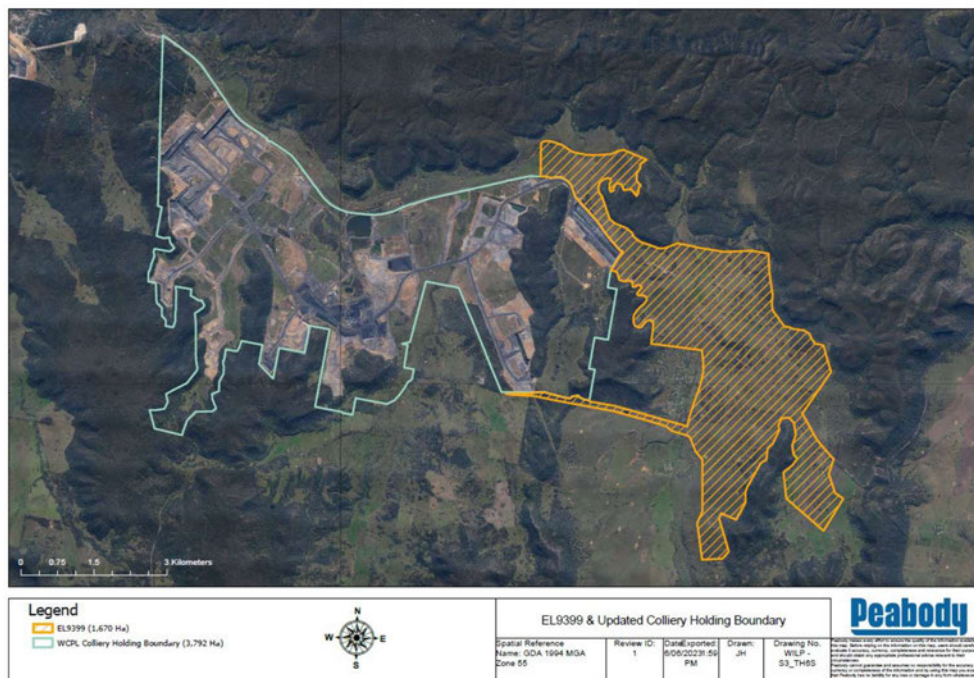
WPA wishes to comment on the following issues to be included in the 2025 Work Plan:

1. NZC to provide recommendations to NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure on proposed coal mine expansions
2. Identify opportunities for transition and diversification for communities in NSW coalfields
3. Conduct inclusive community engagement in regional areas

Proposed coal mine expansion in Wollar district

Peabody Energy Wilpinjong Coal Mine has approval to mine thermal coal through opencut operations until 2033. The mine has been operating since 2006 supplying Bayswater Power Station and export coal. Bayswater is due to close in 2033.

In 2022 a new large exploration licence was granted to Peabody covering 1,668 ha. This is currently being assessed for a major mine expansion. We note that the NZC has identified that proposals to extend or expand a coal mine requires specific attention in 2025.



The environmental and social impacts of the Wilpinjong Coal Mine have been extensive with Peabody becoming the largest landholder in the district because of the level of mine pollution impacts on the community. Remaining private landholders are keeping the community functioning and look forward to the transition away from coal mining rather than unsustainable and ongoing expansions.

WPA requests that the NZC pay particular attention to the assessment process for this mine expansion.

The NSW Productivity and Equality Commission has produced a recent report in its Net Zero series that suggests a key policy direction to achieve climate targets in NSW that includes setting 'a clear deadline for decommissioning thermal coal mining for export'.¹

There is an opportunity with the Wilpinjong Coal Mine to start the decommissioning process in 2033 in line with the timing to meet the net zero targets. It is unsustainable for the NSW Government to continue expanding coal production when science is telling us that the no more fossil fuels should be extracted to maintain a safe climate.

¹ <https://www.productivity.nsw.gov.au/ensuring-a-cost-effective-transition>

The downstream emissions from coal projects, or Scope 3 emissions, must be fully assessed including the social, environmental and economic costs of those increased emissions. The cost-benefits analysis of coal expansion in NSW is currently not required to consider the costs of extreme weather events to the local, state and national economies. It is clear that climate change induced extreme weather is having an enormous impact on lives, livelihoods and economic management across NSW and Australia.

Opportunities for transition in Wollar

The Wollar district provides an ideal opportunity for the transition to commence in the Mid-Western Region local government area.

Wollar has a large number of vacant house blocks for providing new housing to alleviate the accommodation crisis in the region and to encourage the repopulation of the district. This can be achieved at the same time as the reduction of GHG emissions and the construction of renewable energy sources.

The Wollar Solar Farm has been completed and is applying to build a larger storage battery on site, the nearby Goulburn River Solar Farm has been approved and is under construction, and construction of the new switching station at Wollar and new transmission lines for the Central West Orana REZ has commenced preliminary works.

Mine expansion is competing for the necessary labour force for the renewable energy rollout, construction and housing industries in this region.

The proposed Future Jobs and Investment Authorities need to be established as soon as possible with a revised approach that will deliver local and community-led statutory transition authorities with clear lines of authority direct to the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Funding for retraining mine workers, particularly in the fields of electrical engineers and electricians to service the urgent renewable energy roll out, should be a top priority and a key recommendation of the NZC.

The Mid-Western Regional (MWRC) LGA has become overly dependent on the mining sector and is losing the diversity opportunities needed for future sustainability. The capture of local government by the mining industry is a key issue that must be recognised. MWRC currently objects strongly to renewable energy projects while supporting coal mine expansion.

Inclusive community engagement

WPA notes that one of the NZC responsibilities under the Act is to share knowledge and information. The proposal to hold regular briefings and workshops for key stakeholders and to seek community engagement opportunities in regional areas must be inclusive of communities such as Wollar, who are impacted by both coal mine expansion and renewable energy projects.

The NZC workplan should clearly outline who is determined to be a key stakeholder and what criteria will be used to determine communities to be included in engagement opportunities. It is not reasonable to assume that local government is representative of all impacted communities.

Key recommendations for 2025 workplan:

1. Urgently use your functions under s15 1d) of the Act to provide a dedicated report on the risks posed by proposed coal expansions to NSW climate targets and outline the policy changes needed to address it. The current NSW Coal Strategy ² is still the key policy informing decision-makers on coal expansion. The NZC must put forward a phase-down plan as proposed by the NSW Productivity Commission to prevent any further coal mine expansions.
2. Use your powers under s15 2g) of the Act to set stringent coal sectoral targets for 2030 and 2035 and mandate abatement requirements to reduce emissions from existing coal mines.
3. Use your powers under s15 3) of the Act to provide advice to the Independent Planning Commission on the proposed Moolarben Open Cut 3 expansion in the Mudgee Region to set a standard for greenhouse gas assessment that reflects the NZC's view on the risks posed by coal projects to NSW.
4. Identify opportunities for diversification in coal dependent communities through partnership with Future Jobs and Investment Authorities.
5. Develop an inclusive community engagement plan that includes small rural communities impacted by coal mining operations.

² NSW Government, 2020. *Strategic Statement on Coal Exploration and Mining in NSW*