

INVESTIGATION INFORMATION RELEASE

AUGUST 2019

Improving progressive rehabilitation at Whitehaven's open cut coal mines

Overview

The NSW Resources Regulator's pro-active inspection and assessment program has detected poor rehabilitation outcomes at a number of mines operated by the Whitehaven Group.

This information release aims to provide guidance about achieving sustainable rehabilitation outcomes.

The mines

Tarrawonga

The Tarrawonga Coal Mine is located approximately 16 kilometres east of Boggabri. The mine produces a mix of low ash, low sulphur, low phosphorous and medium to high volatility coal.

The rehabilitation obligations for the Tarrawonga Coal Mine are set out in the approved [Mining Operations Plan](#).

Rocglen

The Rocglen Coal Mine is located approximately 28 kilometres north of Gunnedah. The mine produces medium to high ash, low sulfur, low phosphorous and medium to high volatility coal.

The rehabilitation obligations for the Rocglen Coal Mine are set out in the approved [Mining Operations Plan](#).

Sunnyside

The Sunnyside Coal Mine is located approximately 15 kilometres west of Gunnedah. Coal extraction is expected to cease in November 2019. As with the Tarrawonga and Rocglen mines, coal is trucked to

Whitehaven's Gunnedah Coal Handling and Preparation Plant, then transported by rail to Newcastle for export. The Tarrawonga, Rocglen and Sunnyside Coal Mines are operated by Whitehaven Coal Mining Pty Limited.

The rehabilitation obligations for the Sunnyside Coal Mine are set out in the approved [Mining Operations Plan](#).

Maules Creek

The Maules Creek Mine is about 18 km north east of Boggabri. The mine produces thermal and metallurgical coals, which is transported by rail to Newcastle for export. The Maules Creek Mine is operated by Maules Creek Coal Pty Ltd, a subsidiary of Whitehaven Coal Limited. The rehabilitation obligations for the Maules Creek Mine are set out in the approved [Mining Operations Plan](#).

Rehabilitation concerns

Tarrawonga

The Tarrawonga Coal Mine started producing coal in late 2006. The Regulator expects that a mine operating for 13 years would be able to demonstrate significant areas of progressive rehabilitation reaching ecosystem establishment.

Figure 1 shows poor revegetation at Tarrawonga. This area was shaped five to six years ago, with an open woodland rehabilitation objective.

Figure 1 Tarrawonga Coal Mine's poorly wooded revegetation



This photograph shows no visible signs of established tree species. Rather, the rehabilitation area has a thick cover of exotic grasses and weed species. Under these circumstances, establishing a woodland area would be difficult and resource intensive.

Rocglen

Figure 2 depicts the third attempt of woodland revegetation at the Rocglen Mine Northern Emplacement Area. Its target rehabilitation objective was open woodland. This area is three to five years old and is **not progressing well**. Tubestock has been planted in this area on three occasions without success.

Figure 2 Woodland revegetation at Rocglen Mine



Compliance activities

The Regulator has issued statutory notices pursuant to section 240(1)(c) of the *Mining Act 1992* to Whitehaven Coal Mining Ltd requiring it to engage suitably qualified experts across its four operations (Tarrawonga, Rocglen, Sunnyside and Maules Creek) to:

- provide information regarding the status of progressive rehabilitation
- advise whether progressive rehabilitation has been undertaken in accordance with approved plans and strategies
- identify measures or actions to improve progressive rehabilitation performance

- submit a report to the Regulator that includes a timeline to improve progressive rehabilitation at each site.

The Regulator will continue to closely monitor and enforce compliance with rehabilitation obligations in accordance with the *Mining Act 1992*. A further information release will be prepared following Whitehaven's completion of the actions required by the abovementioned section 240 notices.

Recommendations

The Regulator expects mine operators to achieve sustainable rehabilitation outcomes by:

- planning for progressive rehabilitation
- undertaking rehabilitation progressively
- monitoring rehabilitation progress
- seeking progressive approvals for rehabilitation outcomes
- maintaining rehabilitation records.

Further information

- [NSW Resources Regulator Exploration and mining rehabilitation fact sheet](#)
- [Australian Government, Department of Industry, Innovation and Science 2016: Leading Practice Sustainable Development Program for the Mining Industry – Mine Rehabilitation](#)
- [Australian Government, Department of Industry, Innovation and Science 2016: Leading Practice Sustainable Development Program for the Mining Industry – Mine Closure and Completion](#)

About this information release

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing. However, because advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that the information upon which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate officer of the NSW Resources Regulator or the user's independent advisor.

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- learn more about your rehabilitation obligations
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