

# MOOLARBEN COAL COMPLEX OC3 EXTENSION PROJECT

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

### SECTION I

### INTRODUCTION



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Moolarben Coal Complex is located approximately 40 kilometres (km) north of Mudgee in the Western Coalfields of New South Wales (NSW) (Figures 1-1 and 1-2). The Moolarben Coal Complex is operated by Moolarben Coal Operations Pty Ltd (MCO).

The Moolarben Coal Complex is an existing mining operation, comprising the Stage 1 Project Approval (05\_0117; as modified) and Stage 2 Project Approval (08\_0135; as modified) and involves four approved open cut mining areas (OC1 to OC4), three approved underground mining areas (UG1, UG2 and UG4) and other mining related infrastructure (including coal processing and transport facilities) (Figure 1-3).

Mining operations at the Moolarben Coal Complex are currently approved until 31 December 2038 with a combined coal production rate of 22 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa).

MCO currently operates across multiple open cut mining areas and, at current production rates, mining within the approved OC3 mining areas<sup>1</sup> is forecast to be completed in 2025. Mining activities in the remaining Stage 1 and Stage 2 open cut mining areas (OC1, OC2 and OC4) would continue beyond 2025 within the currently approved mine life of the Moolarben Coal Complex (i.e. until 2038).

MCO has identified an opportunity to extend open cut mining operations immediately south of the approved OC3 open cut pit as well as develop four new open cut pits to the east and south-east of the approved OC3 mining area, within existing mining tenements. The extended open cut mining operations would provide approximately 10 years of mining (from 2025 to 2034), which would occur in parallel with mining of OC4. This would maximise use of the existing mining infrastructure and equipment, and maintain steady production of off-mine (ROM) coal at the Moolarben Coal Complex. Following completion of mining within the OC3 mining area.

This document is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Moolarben Coal Complex OC3 Extension Project (the Project) which has been prepared in accordance with the Planning Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) issued on 21 January 2022.

**The Project would maximise use of the existing mining fleet and maintain steady production of ROM coal at the Moolarben Coal Complex.**

## 1.1 APPLICANT DETAILS

MCO (ABN: 59 077 939 569) is the applicant for the Project. The contact details for MCO are:

Moolarben Coal Operations Pty Ltd

Postal: Locked Bag 2003,  
Mudgee NSW 2850

Phone: +61 2 6376 1500

The MCO website is:

<http://www.moolarbencoal.com.au>

The Moolarben Coal Complex is located at 12 Ulan-Wollar Road, Ulan NSW 2850.

## 1.2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

### 1.2.1 Purpose of this Document

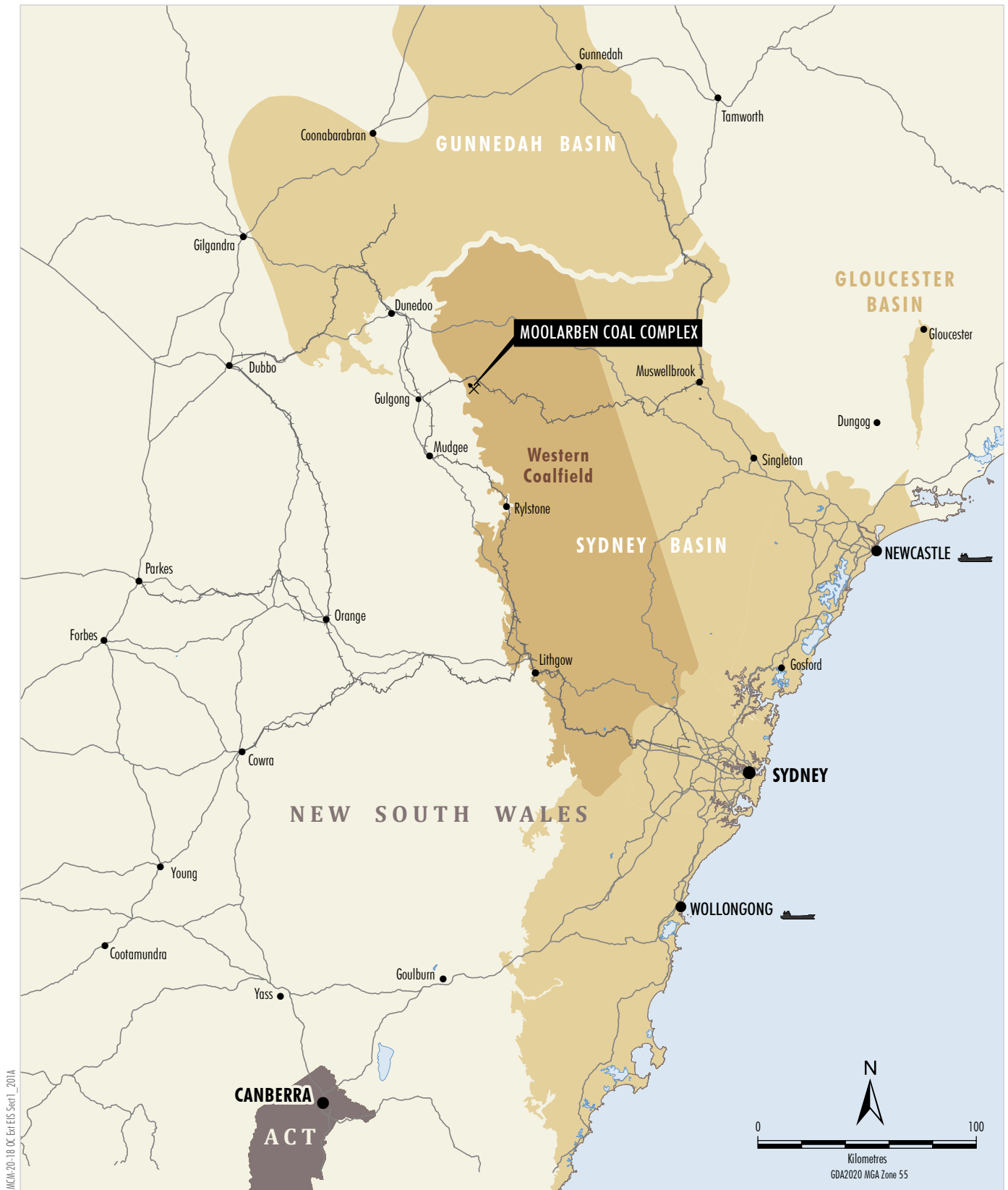
This EIS has been prepared to accompany a Development Application made for the Project, in accordance with Part 4 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act).

This EIS considers the potential environmental impacts of the Project in accordance with sections 190-192 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021* (EP&A Regulation) and the SEARs issued by the then NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE; now referred to as Department of Planning and Environment [DPE]).

The SEARs were issued in accordance with the requirements of section 176 of the EP&A Regulation, with supplementary *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) assessment requirements issued on 2 June 2022.

The SEARs and a reconciliation of where the SEARs are addressed in the EIS are provided in full in Attachment 1.

<sup>1</sup> The "approved OC3 mining area" refers to the open cut mining areas within OC3 as approved under the Stage 1 Project Approval (05\_0117).



Source: NSW Spatial Services (2021)

**YANCOAL**  
 昆煤澳大利亚有限公司  
**MOOLARBEN COAL**  
**MOOLARBEN COAL COMPLEX**  
 Regional Location

**Figure 1-1**

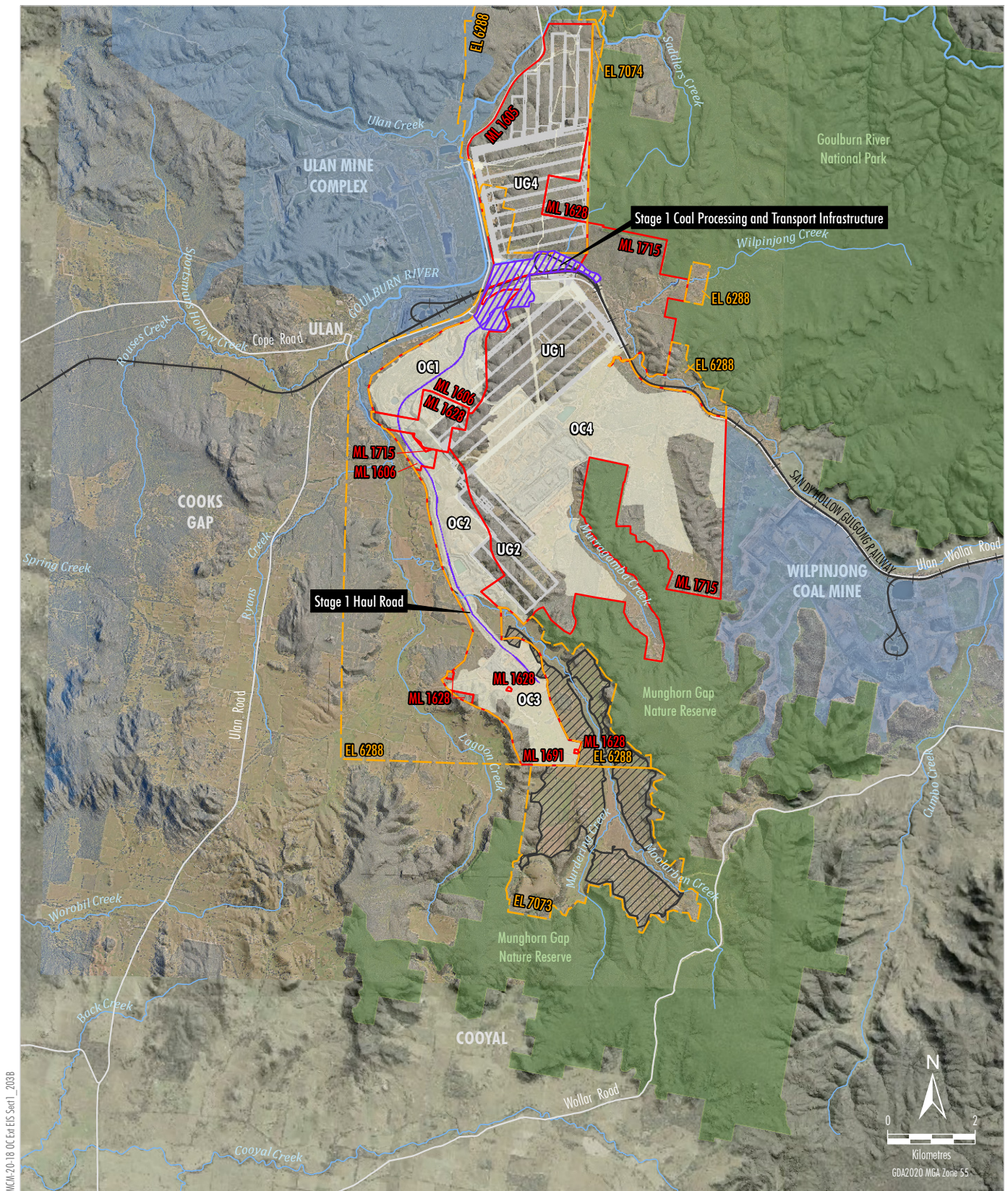




**YANCOAL**  
MOOLARBEN COAL  
Project Location

**Figure 1-2**





MCW-20-18 OC Ext EIS Set1\_2039

- LEGEND**
- National Park/Nature Reserve
  - Other Mining Operation
  - Exploration Licence Boundary
  - Mining Lease Boundary
  - Existing/Approved Development
  - Underground Longwall Layout
  - Moolarben Coal Complex Disturbance Footprint
  - Stage 1 Coal Processing and Transport Infrastructure Footprint
  - OC3 Extension Project
  - Indicative Surface Disturbance Extent

Source: MCO (2022); NSW Spatial Services (2021)  
Orthophoto: MCO (Jan 2021)

  
**MOOLARBEN COAL COMPLEX**  
 Approved Moolarben Coal Complex and  
 Proposed Open Cut Extension

**Figure 1-3**



A summary indicating where the SEARs relating to EPBC Act requirements have been addressed in this EIS is provided in Attachment 2.

### 1.2.2 Project Objectives

Clause 192(1)(b) of the EP&A Regulation requires that an EIS must include a statement of the objectives of the development.

The objectives of the Project can be summarised as follows:

1. Undertake a logical extension of the Moolarben Coal Complex.
2. Avoid sensitive environmental features within the Moolarben Valley.
3. Develop the Project within existing Moolarben Coal Complex amenity criteria.
4. Facilitate an improved final landform and enable suitable post-mining land uses.

Further details on each of these objectives is provided below.

#### **Extension of Moolarben Coal Complex**

The Moolarben Coal Complex is an existing operation, comprising four approved open cut mining areas, three approved underground mining areas, and other mining-related infrastructure including coal processing and transport facilities.

The Project would use existing and approved infrastructure and equipment at the Moolarben Coal Complex, eliminating the requirement to construct significant new infrastructure such as a Coal Handling and Preparation Plant (CHPP) and train load-out facilities.

The Project area is immediately adjacent to the approved OC3 mining area, which would likely be completed in 2025. Therefore, the Project would provide the opportunity to maintain continuity of open cut mining and steady production of ROM coal at the Moolarben Coal Complex following completion of OC3 operations and in parallel with mining in OC4.

The existing open cut workforce would be employed for the Project. Mining of the Project area would follow the completion of the approved OC3 operations and therefore this workforce (and mining fleet) would shift to the Project area. The Project would provide continuity and security of employment by extending the duration of employment for existing open cut workforce.

There would be substantial capital savings associated with the use of existing infrastructure and mobile equipment at the Moolarben Coal Complex, and operational cost efficiencies associated with the use of existing Moolarben Coal Complex systems and workforce.

#### **Avoidance of Sensitive Environmental Features**

The Project area is located in the Moolarben Valley, which is surrounded in part by the Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve.

Moving outwards from the centre of the Moolarben Valley, the topography progresses from relatively flat, previously cleared areas, to steep areas with native vegetation along the edges of the Project area, adjacent to the Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve.

The Project would be located largely within land that has been previously cleared for low-intensity agriculture (i.e. grazing and dryland cropping).

Direct disturbance of more sensitive environmental features associated with steep, vegetated areas (i.e. mapped rocky habitat<sup>2</sup> associated with threatened bat species and the Broad-headed Snake) would be avoided.

Moolarben Creek and Murdering Creek are the relevant drainage features that run south to north through the Project area. Open cut mining would stand off these drainage features by 200 metres (m), consistent with the *NSW Aquifer Interference Policy* (NSW Government, 2012a) (AIP)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> "Mapped rocky habitat" refers to breeding habitat for identified threatened bat species (Large-eared Pied Bat [*Chalinolobus dwyeri*] and Eastern Cave Bat [*Vespadelus troughtoni*]) and the Broad-headed Snake (*Hoplocephalus bungaroides*) mapped by AMBS Ecology and Heritage (AMBS) as at 22 August 2022 (Appendix C).

<sup>3</sup> The water quality criteria in the AIP specifies no mining activity to be below the natural ground surface within 200 m laterally from a highly connected water supply that is defined as a "reliable water supply". Moolarben Creek is defined as a "reliable water source" under the *Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan 2012* (NSW Government, 2012b). The criteria has also conservatively been applied to Murdering Creek.

**Development within Existing Amenity Criteria**

Amenity impacts (i.e. noise, air quality and visual impacts) from the existing Moolarben Coal Complex have previously been assessed and approved under the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Project Approvals (05\_0117 and 08\_0135, respectively).

The Project has been designed to comply with the existing amenity criteria for the Moolarben Coal Complex.

The location of the Project within the Moolarben Valley and surrounding elevated topography (associated with the Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve and other nearby ridgelines) provides a natural barrier which limits amenity impacts to nearby private residences.

Additionally, the Project would be integrated into the existing Moolarben Coal Complex operations, resulting in no change to the overall mine life or peak production rate and, therefore, there would be no additional potential amenity impacts beyond those previously approved.

**Improved Final Landform Suitable for Post-mining Land Uses**

Currently, the approved OC3 final landform includes a final void. Post-mining land uses of the OC3 mining area are a combination of woodland and agriculture.

Open cut voids within the Project area would be progressively backfilled to develop a free-draining final landform rather than leaving a water filled void.

In order to facilitate appropriate post-mining land uses, some areas of steeper slopes would not be mined, enabling safe, stable final landforms to be developed.

Waste rock from the Project would also be used to backfill the approved OC3 final void associated with the Stage 1 Project Approval, resulting in no final voids in the Project area (including in the approved OC3 area). The entire Project area would therefore be made suitable for post-mining land uses.

**The Project would result in no final voids, including in the approved OC3 area, reducing the number of voids in the Moolarben Valley from one to zero.**

The landform would be progressively rehabilitated to complement surrounding land uses, in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The indicative post-mining land uses are a combination of native vegetation and agriculture, as per the approved OC3 and consistent with the remaining Moolarben Coal Complex (and pre-mining land uses). The proposed final landform design would not preclude alternative post-mining land uses (e.g. residences, solar energy projects) should these be determined to be the preferred land uses in the future.

**1.2.3 Project Summary**

The Project would extend open cut mining operations immediately south of the approved OC3 open cut pit and develop four new open cut pits to the east and south-east of the approved OC3 mining area. The extended and new open cut pits would be within existing mining and exploration tenements on Moolarben-owned freehold land (with minor areas of Council/Crown Land). The extension would provide for approximately 10 years of resource extraction, which would continue to occur in parallel with mining of OC4.

The Project would include the following activities:

- extension of open cut mining operations within Mining Lease (ML) 1691, Exploration Licence (EL) 6288, and EL 7073 to allow mining of additional coal resources;
- extraction of up to 9 Mtpa of ROM coal, with a total of approximately 40 million tonnes (Mt) over the life of the Project;
- mining operations between approximately 2025 to 2034 (within the approved life of the Moolarben Coal Complex ending on 31 December 2038);
- extension of employment of existing open cut workforce;
- construction and operation of ancillary infrastructure in support of mining operations;
- construction and operation of water management and water storage infrastructure in support of mining operations;
- development of an integrated final landform with the approved OC3 mining area;
- ongoing exploration activities in the Project area (Figure 1-3);
- construction of haul road creek crossings;
- quarrying and/or excavation of borrow pits within approved disturbance areas to retrieve construction materials;



- conventional open cut mining related activities such as drilling and blasting, and other associated activities; and
- rehabilitation, decommissioning and closure.

**The extension would provide for approximately 10 years of resource extraction, which would occur in parallel with mining of the approved OC4 open cut.**

A detailed Project Description is provided in Section 3 of this EIS.

The proposed Action to extend open cut mining to the south of the approved OC3 open cut pit and develop four new open cut pits to the east and south-east of the approved OC3 mining area at the Moolarben Coal Complex (herein referred to as “the proposed Action”) was referred to the Commonwealth Minister for Environment and Energy (the Commonwealth Minister) in February 2022 (EPBC 2022/9162). A delegate of the Commonwealth Minister determined on 2 May 2022 that the proposed Action is a “Controlled Action” and, therefore, the Action also requires approval under the EPBC Act.

The proposed Action is to be assessed pursuant to the Assessment Bilateral Agreement with the NSW Government. Therefore, this EIS provides an assessment of potential impacts on the following controlling provisions considered by the Commonwealth Minister (or delegate) to be relevant to the proposed Action:

- threatened species and communities listed under the EPBC Act (sections 18 and 18A); and
- water resources (section 24D and 24E).

Supplementary SEARs that relate to the EPBC Act controlling provisions and a reconciliation of where they are addressed in this EIS is provided in Attachment 2.

## 1.3 BACKGROUND

### 1.3.1 History of the Moolarben Coal Complex

MCO is the operator of the existing approved Moolarben Coal Complex on behalf of the Moolarben Joint Venture (Moolarben Coal Mines Pty Ltd [MCM], Yancoal Moolarben Pty Ltd [YM] and a consortium of Korean power companies). MCO, MCM and YM are wholly owned subsidiaries of Yancoal Australia Limited (Yancoal).

The Moolarben Coal Project Stage 1 was approved on 6 September 2007 by the NSW Minister for Planning (Project Approval [05\_0117]). Stage 2 was approved on 30 January 2015 by the Planning Assessment Commission (as delegate of the NSW Minister for Planning) (Project Approval [08\_0135]).

Since the commencement of coal mining operations in 2010, open cut mining activities have occurred within OC1, OC2, OC3 and OC4. First workings for underground operations at UG1 commenced in 2016, with secondary workings (i.e. longwall extraction) commencing in 2017. Underground development for UG4 commenced in 2020, and secondary extraction commenced in 2022.

The main infrastructure area at the Moolarben Coal Complex includes the CHPP, coal stockpiles, and train load-out facility approved under the Stage 1 Project Approval (05\_0117) (Figure 1-3). All ROM coal from Stage 1 and Stage 2 mining operations is handled, processed and loaded to trains using the Stage 1 infrastructure.

The general arrangement of the approved Moolarben Coal Complex is shown on Figure 1-3.

### 1.3.2 Summary of Key Avoidance, Minimisation and Offset Strategies

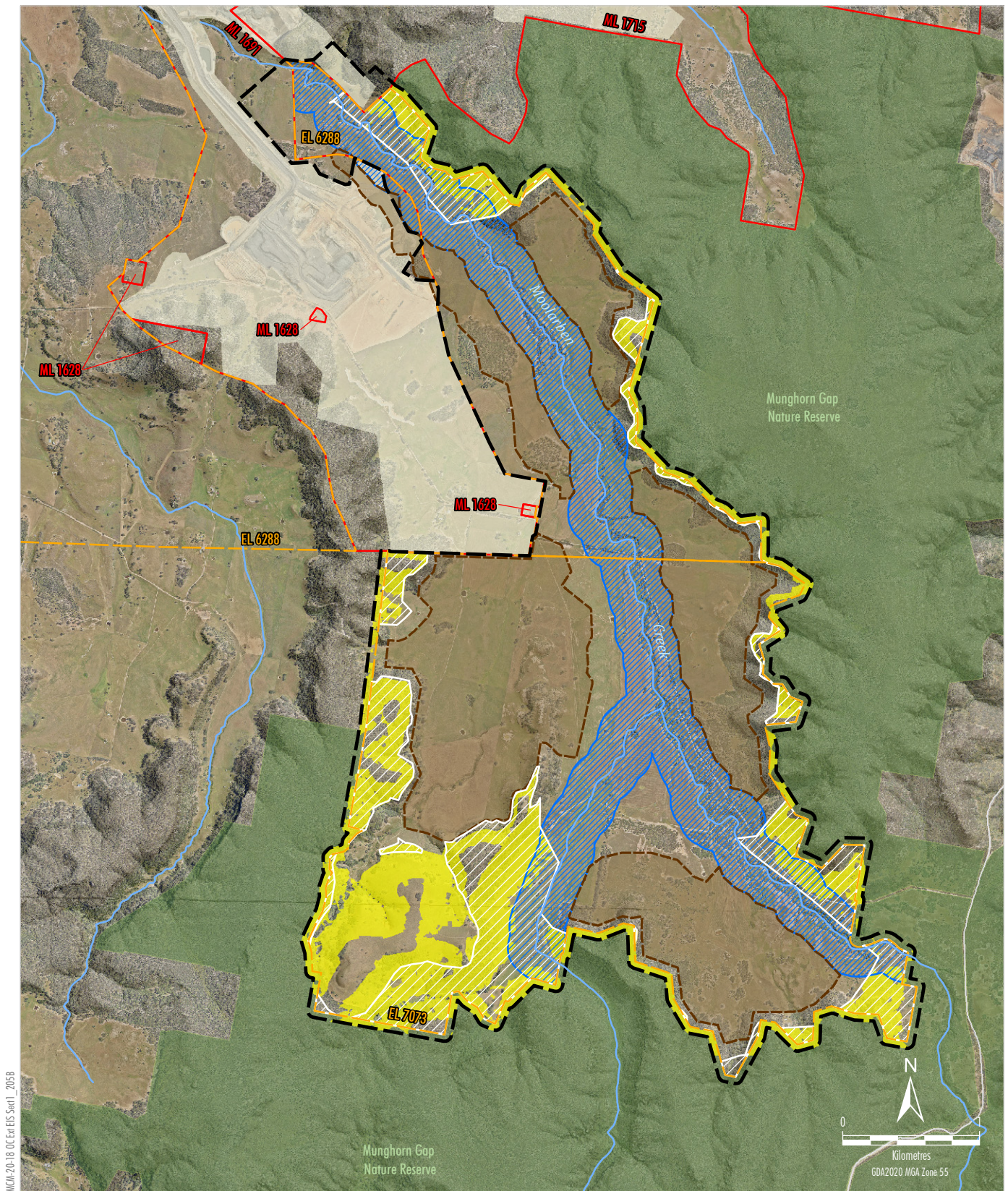
Key avoidance and minimisation measures for the Project include (Figure 1-4):

- locating the proposed open cuts largely within valley floor areas previously cleared for low-intensity agriculture;
- avoiding disturbance of mapped rocky habitat associated with threatened bat species and the Broad-headed Snake located on the steeper terrain adjacent to the Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve; and
- avoiding open cut mining within 200 m of Moolarben Creek and Murdering Creek.

**Open cut mining for the Project would avoid disturbance of mapped rocky habitat associated with threatened bat species and the Broad-headed Snake and, land within 200 m of major (4th order and above)**

When considered cumulatively, the Project would not change the approved mine life, annual ROM coal mining rate or annual coal production rate of the existing Moolarben Coal Complex.





MMW-20-18 OC Ext EIS Sect 1\_205B

#### LEGEND

- National Park /Nature Reserve
- Exploration Licence Boundary
- Mining Lease Boundary
- Moolarben Coal Complex Disturbance Footprint
- OC3 Extension Project
- Project Area
- No Proposed Open Cut Mining (Ancillary and Supporting Infrastructure Only)
- Indicative Rocky Habitat Avoidance Area
- Open Cut Pit Extent
- Indicative Steep Slopes (> 10%) to be Avoided by the Project

Source: MCO (2022); NSW Spatial Services (2021)  
Orthophoto: MCO (Jan 2021)



MOOLARBEN COAL COMPLEX

Key Project Avoidance  
and Minimisation Measures

Figure 1-4



Offset strategies for the Project would be determined through development of a biodiversity offset strategy as per the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act).

Additional avoidance, minimisation and offset strategies are detailed in Section 6 and Attachment 9.

Details on how the Project would address the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) are provided in Section 7.

**The Project would not change the approved mine life, annual ROM coal mining rate or annual coal production rate of the existing Moolarben Coal Complex.**

### 1.3.3 Land Ownership

The Project Development Application area includes those lands listed in the real property description provided in support of the Development Application (Attachment 3). Relevant ownership information for land parcels surrounding the Project is provided on Figure 1-5 (a full list of landowners is provided in Attachment 4).

## 1.4 RELATED DEVELOPMENT

### 1.4.1 Approved Moolarben Coal Complex

While the Project is an extension to existing operations at the Moolarben Coal Complex, the Project would be lodged as a stand-alone Development Application and, if approved, would operate concurrently with Stages 1 and 2 under a new Development Consent.

Operations at the existing approved Moolarben Coal Complex include exploration activities and extraction of coal within ML 1605, 1606, 1628, 1691 and 1715, and exploration activities within EL 6288, 7073 and 7074 (Figure 1-3). Extraction methods used include conventional open cut mining methods (i.e. truck and shovel operations) and underground mining methods (i.e. longwall).

Mining operations are approved until 31 December 2038 under the Stages 1 and 2 Project Approvals (05\_0117 and 08\_0135, respectively).

### **Moolarben Coal Project Stage 1**

Stage 1 of the Moolarben Coal Complex comprises open cut operations in OC1, OC2 and OC3, underground operations in UG4, coal processing and transport facilities and water treatment facilities.

Consistent with the existing configuration between Stage 1 and Stage 2, ROM coal extracted for the Project would be trucked via the Stage 1 haul road to be handled, processed and loaded to trains via the existing Stage 1 infrastructure (Figure 1-3). This would be subject to a separate modification to the Stage 1 Project Approval (05\_0117).

Section 3 provides a comparative summary of the activities associated with the Project compared to the approved Moolarben Coal Complex.

Existing mining operations, coal processing and transport activities associated with the approved Stage 1 would continue in accordance with Project Approval (05\_0117).

### **Moolarben Coal Project Stage 2**

Stage 2 of the Moolarben Coal Complex comprises open cut operations in OC4 and underground operations in UG1 and UG2. All ROM coal produced by the Stage 2 operations is transported to the Stage 1 coal processing and transport facilities.

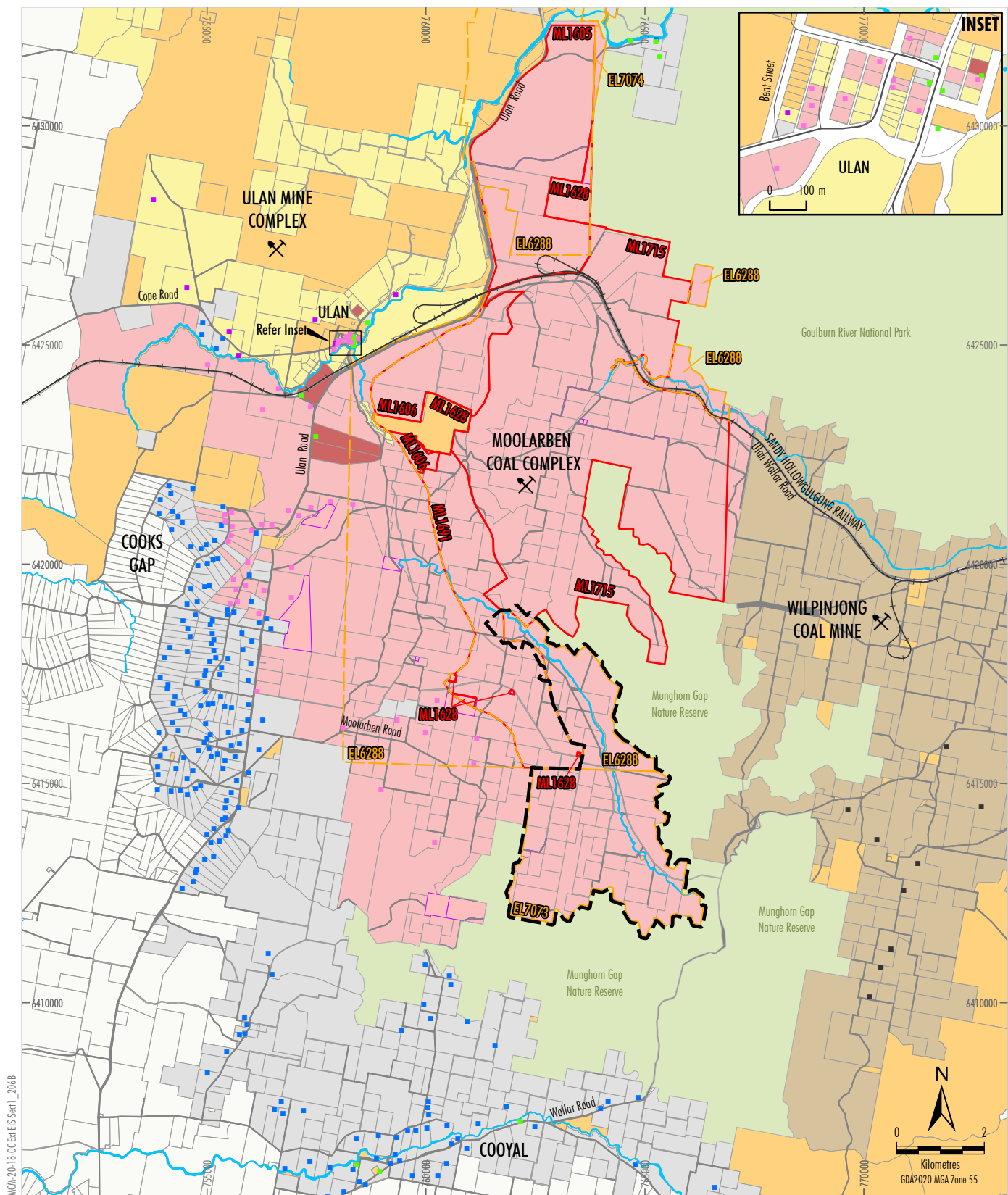
Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Moolarben Coal Complex operate as an integrated mining operation, with shared water management, reject disposal and other environmental management strategies. It is not expected that any modification to Stage 2 would be required to incorporate the Project.

Existing mining operations associated with Stage 2 would continue in accordance with Project Approval (08\_0135).

### 1.4.2 Other Nearby Projects

A summary of nearby projects including the Ulan Mine Complex and the Wilpinjong Coal Mine, as well as a description of potential cumulative interactions between the Project and other nearby projects, is provided in Section 2.3.





Source: MCO (2022); NSW Spatial Services (2021)

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MOOLARBEN COAL  
MOOLARBEN COAL COMPLEX  
Land Ownership Overview

Figure 1-5

## 1.5 PROJECT RESTRICTIONS

The strategic context for the Project, including Government strategic planning documents, is described in Section 2. Additionally, the statutory context for the Project, including legislated approval requirements, is described in Section 4. There are no restrictions or covenants applicable to Project development or operations.

## 1.6 PROJECT CONSULTANTS

This EIS was prepared for MCO by Resource Strategies Pty Ltd (Resource Strategies) with specialist input provided by the following organisations:

- MCO (project design, alternatives and justification, baseline data, land tenure, resource economics, consultation, preliminary hazard analysis, rehabilitation and environmental management and monitoring);
- Australasian Groundwater and Environmental Consultants Pty Ltd (AGE) (Groundwater Assessment);
- WRM Water and Environment Pty Ltd (WRM) (Surface Water and Flood Impact Assessment);
- Niche Environment and Heritage Pty Ltd (Niche) (Biodiversity Development Assessment Report, Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment and Non-Aboriginal Heritage Assessment);
- AMBS Ecology and Heritage (AMBS) (Baseline Fauna Survey Report);
- Eco Logical Australia (ELA) (Baseline Flora Survey Report);
- BIO-ANALYSIS Pty Ltd (BioAnalysis) (Aquatic Ecology Assessment);
- CDM Smith Australia Pty Ltd (CDM Smith) (Social Impact Assessment);
- SLR Consulting Australia Pty Ltd (SLR) (Noise and Blasting Impact Assessment);
- Todoroski Air Sciences Pty Ltd (TAS) (Air Quality Impact Assessment and Greenhouse Gas Calculations);
- Analytecon Pty Ltd (Economic Assessment);
- 2rog Consulting Pty Ltd (2rog) (Agricultural Impact Assessment);
- Minesoils Pty Ltd (Minesoils) (Soils and Land Impact Assessment Report);

- Environment and Natural Resource Solutions Pty Ltd (ENRS) (Land Contamination Assessment);
- The Transport Planning Partnership Pty Ltd (TTPP) (Road Transport Assessment);
- RGS Environmental Consultants Pty Ltd (RGS) (Geochemistry Assessment and Spontaneous Combustion Report);
- CK Consultants Pty. Ltd. (CK Consulting) (facilitation of Environmental Risk Assessment);
- Golder Associates Pty Ltd (final landform design and erosion risk modelling);
- WT Partnership (Capital Investment Value Report);
- Lambert Geotech Pty Ltd (geotechnical review); and
- Minter Ellison (legal review).

In addition, peer review was undertaken by the following specialists (Attachment 5):

- Brian Barnett (Co-author of the *Australian Groundwater Modelling Guidelines* [Barnett et al., 2012]) (groundwater); and
- GHD Group Pty Ltd (GHD) (greenhouse gas).

## 1.7 STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This EIS comprises a main text component and supporting studies, which include Appendices A through to S. An overview of the main text is presented below:

Section 1	Provides an introduction to the Project and this EIS.
Section 2	Outlines the strategic planning context for the Project.
Section 3	Describes the various components and stages of the Project.
Section 4	Outlines the statutory provisions relevant to the Project.
Section 5	Describes the consultation and engagement undertaken in relation to this EIS and ongoing community involvement.

Section 6	Details the environmental assessment of the Project, including a description of the existing environment, an assessment of potential impacts and a description of the measures that would be implemented to avoid, minimise, mitigate, offset, manage and/or monitor the potential impacts of the Project.	Attachment 16	Consent Under Section 380AA of the Mining Act.
		Appendices A to S contain supporting information, including a number of specialist reports:	
		Appendix A	Groundwater Assessment.
		Appendix B	Surface Water and Flood Impact Assessment.
Section 7	Describes how the Project (when compared with other alternatives) is in the public interest and balances impacts, strategic needs, and benefits.	Appendix C	Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (BDAR).
		Appendix D	Aquatic Ecology Assessment.
		Appendix E	Social Impact Assessment (SIA).
Section 8	Lists the documents referenced in Sections 1 to 7 of this EIS.	Appendix F	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment (ACHA).
Section 9	Defines abbreviations and acronyms used in Sections 1 to 7 of this EIS.	Appendix G	Non-Aboriginal Heritage Assessment (NAHA) and Statement of Heritage Impact (SoHI).
Attachments to the main text are also provided as follows:		Appendix H	Noise and Blasting Impact Assessment.
Attachment 1	Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements.	Appendix I	Air Quality Impact Assessment.
Attachment 2	Cross-reference to Assessment Requirements Relevant to the EPBC Act.	Appendix J	Greenhouse Gas Assessment.
Attachment 3	Development Application Area and Real Property Descriptions.	Appendix K	Economic Assessment.
Attachment 4	Land Ownership and Landholder Key.	Appendix L	Agricultural Impact Assessment.
Attachment 5	Peer Review Letters.	Appendix M	Land Contamination Assessment.
Attachment 6	Other Strategic Planning Statements and Policies.	Appendix N	Landscape and Visual Assessment.
Attachment 7	Relevant Environmental Planning Instruments and Legislation.	Appendix O	Road Transport Assessment.
Attachment 8	Rehabilitation and Mine Closure Addendum.	Appendix P	Geochemistry Assessment.
Attachment 9	Summary of Mitigation Measures.	Appendix Q	Environmental Risk Assessment (ERA).
Attachment 10	Capital Investment Value Estimate Report.	Appendix R	Preliminary Hazard Analysis (PHA).
Attachment 11	Community Information.	Appendix S	Groundwater Dependent Ecosystem (GDE) Assessment.
Attachment 12	Joint Ore Reserve Committee (JORC) Summary.		
Attachment 13	Geotechnical Considerations.		
Attachment 14	Aquifer Interference Policy Considerations and Water Licensing Considerations.		
Attachment 15	Copy of Public Notice.		