

Our Reference: 5856
Date: 10 August 2015

Mr David Calvert
A/g Assistant Secretary
Environment Assessment Branch
Department of the Environment
Canberra, ACT

RE: EPBC 2009/4821 – Year 1 Monitoring Report for Wotonga Offset Area Management Plan – Millennium Mine Expansion Project

Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd (EH Partners) have been engaged by Peabody Energy Australia (Peabody) to implement the management and monitoring requirements for their environmental offset area that has been established on the “Wotonga Pastoral Holding” property, north-east of Moranbah in central Queensland. The offset area was established to comply with conditions of approval under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) (EPBC 2009/4821). This letter has been prepared to show compliance with the monitoring requirements for Year 1 as described in section 4 of the Wotonga Offset Area Management Plan (Ecofund 2013). Offset area details are provided in **Appendix 1**.

Initial monitoring of the offset area was originally scheduled to be completed by 30 June 2014. Year 1 monitoring has been delayed due to several factors including:

- delays in sourcing and contracting a suitable company to implement the Wotonga Offset Area Management Plan;
 - This has been resolved by the engagement of EH Partners to fulfil this role.
- delays in obtaining access to the offset area via the haul road for the Burton Coal Mine, which is operated by Thiess; and
- wet weather delays between November 2014 and April 2015, which resulted in limited opportunities to access the haul road. The haul road is only accessible during dry conditions as it is operated by Thiess as part of the Burton Coal Mine and is closed during and post rainfall due to safety requirements.

The offset area consists of an active management area (containing Brigalow vegetation) and a passive management area (comprising the adjoining scarps and associated vegetation). The offset area was inspected on 4 August, 2015, by Dave Fleming (Principal Ecologist, EH Partners), Daryn Railey (Peabody) and Lance Smith (Agistee, Wotonga Property). Cattle have been excluded from the offset area since November and no other agricultural activities have been undertaken within the area since the offset was established.

Visual Monitoring

Based on the visual inspection and discussions with Mr Smith, the status of the offset area is as follows:

- **Perimeter fencing and gates** – The offsets area (combined active and passive management areas) is fully fenced. The fences are a three strand barb-wire type and are in good condition. Where the fence crosses Brook Creek, additional sections have been included to prevent cattle entering the area. Gates are located at the north-western, south-eastern and south-western corners of the offset

area and are in good condition. No repairs are required to fences or gates at this time. General maintenance is provided by Mr Smith.

- **Noxious and environmental weeds** – The primary weed threat within the offset area is buffel grass *Pennisetum ciliare*. There are also scattered occurrences of velvety tree pear *Opuntia tomentosa*. Velvety tree pear is a declared Class 2 plant under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* (LP Act) and is a Weed of National Significance (WoNS). Buffel grass is established within the offset area, however it varies in extent and density depending upon the age and structure of the brigalow regrowth (generally, the more open the brigalow canopy, the more buffel grass present). Most of the buffel grass observed had died off during the winter months. Weed control activities, including pulse grazing, have not been undertaken.
- **Erosion and areas with high erosion potential** – There are significant areas of gully erosion within the offset area along the eastern boundary fence and stream and channel erosion within Brook Creek. Remediation activities have not been undertaken to date.
- **Bushfire fuel loads** – In the preceding wet season (2014-15), the Moranbah Airport (nearest station to the offset area) experienced slightly above average rainfall (463mm compared to a long-term mean of 419.9mm). Although rainfall in the central Queensland region can be sporadic, the offset area gained sufficient rainfall over the period and new growth was exhibited by the vegetation. Buffel grass, in particular, responds favourably to rainfall and therefore it is likely that fuel loads would be higher than normal due to the absence of grazing pressure and average rainfall.
- **Damage/degradation from pest animal populations** – The primary pest animal threat within the offset area is wild dogs / dingoes *Canis lupus / C. l. dingo*. Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* and wild pigs *Sus scrofa* are also present, but at much lower density. There are no obvious signs of damage or degradation on vegetation or soils from pest animals, however the presence of such pests is likely to result in adverse impacts on the offset area and exacerbation of existing issues such as weed spread and soils erosion. Although there have not been any targeted pest animal management activities conducted on the offset area to date, Mr Smith has undertaken shooting of wild dogs and pigs within the surrounding area.
- **Success of revegetation works** – Active revegetation activities have not been undertaken to date and are not currently planned to occur. The removal of cattle from the offset area has allowed natural regeneration to continue in the absence of grazing pressures.
- **Groundcover and signs of land degradation during pulse grazing** – Cattle have been removed from the offset area since November. Reintroduction of cattle for pulse grazing purposes has not occurred and the risks and benefits of this action are still being considered.

Additional Monitoring Measures (fauna)

Fauna monitoring is planned to occur between September and November 2015 to coincide with peak fauna activity within the central Queensland region. The fauna survey will be completed as per the requirements in the Wotonga Offset Area Management Plan and the results will be appended to this monitoring report.

Field Component of Ecological Equivalence Monitoring

Ecological equivalence monitoring (i.e. BioCondition assessments) of permanent monitoring sites are planned to occur in late August 2015 and the results will be appended to this monitoring report.

Permanent Photo-monitoring Sites

Photo monitoring at permanent sites is planned to occur concurrently with the ecological equivalence monitoring. Photographs from the visual inspection are provided in **Appendix 2**.

Summary

In summary, an inspection of the offset area was undertaken on 4 August, 2015 by representatives from EH Partners, Peabody and the agistee of the Wotonga property for the purposes of visual monitoring according to Section 4 of the Wotonga Offset Area Management Plan. Other activities including fauna monitoring, ecological equivalence and photo-monitoring will be undertaken in late August and fauna monitoring between September and November 2015. The results from these activities will be appended to this report by 18 December 2015.

Yours sincerely



Dave Fleming

Principal Ecologist

Ecology & Heritage Partners

APPENDIX 1 – WOTONGA OFFSET DETAILS

1.1 Departmental Reference Details

Reference and Assessment Details	
Queensland Departmental Reference No: MIN10034430	Queensland Offset ID: TBA
Property Address: Wotonga Pastoral Holding, Ellensfield Road, Burton, Queensland	
Real property description: Lot 13 on SP178466	
Tenure: Leasehold	Primary local government area: Isaac Regional Council

1.2 Offset Area Details

Landholder Details	
Registered Lot on Plan: Lot 13 on SP178466	
Registered Owner/s on Title: State of Queensland	
Lessee: Wotonga Pastoral Pty Ltd	Trustee: N/A
Business/Company name (ABN/CAN): Peabody (Burton Coal) Pty Ltd (formerly Wotonga Pastoral Pty Ltd) (ACN: 077 679 513)	
Phone number: +61 (7) 3239 7279	Mobile Phone: +61 (4) 488 224 546
Fax number: +61 (7) 3229 1776	Contact person: John O'Brien
Email: jobrien2@peabodyenergy.com	
Postal address: GPO Box 1025, Brisbane QLD 4001	

APPENDIX 2 – PHOTO MONITORING



Plate 1 – view east showing low lying brigalow vegetation (left) and vegetation on scarps (right).



Plate 2 – view east showing low lying brigalow vegetation. The foreground shows regenerating *Capparis* species.



Plate 3 – Existing erosion on the south-western slopes.



Plate 4 – Existing erosion on the south-western slopes.



late 5 – Existing erosion along Brook Creek



Plate 4 – Existing erosion on the south-western slopes and condition of fencing.

