

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 61
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Programme: Environment Assessment and Compliance Division
Topic: MAULES CREEK COAL MINE
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Question Type: Written

Senator Waters asked:

SEWPAC got "peer review" of the report by Alison Martin by ecologist, Peter Irish. On page 87 of Part 1 of the documents tabled in response to the Senate order for production of documents on Maules Creek, includes Mr Irish's feedback. Including that

a) On the South-eastern Long-eared Bat habitat: "the argument that the offset habitat is equal or better is not supported"

b) More generally, "As far as I can tell, there is no systematic analysis of the broad vegetation types mapped across the impact and offset sites and their relative condition and suitability as habitat for the three species..."

c) The habitat scores are of limited value and do not allow for an accurate or comprehensive quality assessment for the species at the impact and offset sites."

Why did the Department accept the Martin Report? Did you ignore your own internal advice, or how do you explain that in accepting the report you were adequately protecting MNES?

Answer:

In December 2013, Whitehaven Coal submitted an independent review of the Maules Creek offsets as required under the conditions of the EPBC Act Approval. The review was undertaken by Alison Martin of Greenloaning Bio-studies.

The Department also became aware of third party reports regarding the proposed offsets for the Maules Creek approval with varying findings on the ecological attributes of the offsets and their adequacy in meeting the conditions of the approval.

The Department commissioned Umwelt Environmental Consultants to peer review the third party reports and the Independent Review of the Maules Creek offsets.

The Umwelt report evaluated the methodologies used in the various reports to identify the presence of the critically endangered ecological community White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grasslands and/or habitat for listed species.

The Department has fully considered the Independent Review of Offsets together with a further verification report (also available on Whitehaven Coal's website) and based on this consideration, including the results of the Umwelt report, the Department considers the conclusions of the Independent Review of Offsets and the verification report to be sound.

The Department is continuing to work with Whitehaven to ensure they comply with the requirements of all conditions of the approval.