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Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

Mining company to pay for environmental damage

Media release
21 October 2011

A New South Wales mining company has committed to pay \$1.45 million after causing damage to a nationally threatened ecological community.

An investigation by the federal environment department found that the long wall coal mining operations of Centennial Coal on the Newnes Plateau, near Lithgow, New South Wales, had caused a significant impact on the endangered *Temperate highland peat swamps on sandstone* ecological community.

The mining activities caused a loss of ecosystem function shown by loss of peat, erosion, vegetation dieback and weed invasion in three swamps. They also caused the formation of a large slump hole, several metres wide and more than one metre deep, at the East Wolgan swamp.

These changes mean the swamps can no longer serve their important hydrological role of acting as water filters and releasing water slowly to downstream watercourses.

Centennial Coal will pay \$1.45 million towards a research program to be administered by the Fenner School of Environment and Society at the Australian National University.

This research program will be of great conservation benefit for these protected swamps and inform better understanding of the impacts of land use change.

The program will map the distribution and extent of the swamps, explore their functions, water dynamics, ecology and history, and look at human impacts on the swamps. It will provide valuable knowledge to protect *Temperate highland peat swamps on sandstone* and to promote land management practices that minimise impacts on these swamps.

The payment will be made as an 'enforceable undertaking' under national environment law - the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

This is an effective way to hold companies accountable for environmental damage without going through lengthy and costly legal proceedings.

This outcome shows the Australian Government takes environmental protection seriously, and will not tolerate companies causing needless damage to the environment.

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