

Frequently Asked Questions **Biophysical strategic agricultural land mapping across NSW – exhibition**

WHAT IS ON EXHIBITION?

- The NSW Government is exhibiting mapping which identifies more than one million additional hectares of the State's most valuable farming land – known as biophysical strategic agricultural land (BSAL).
- This land has the best quality soil and water resources and plays a sustaining role in the State's \$12 billion agricultural industry.
- The BSAL criteria were considered across the State and have been identified in areas including the Central West, Mid and Far North Coast, Southern Highlands, Western, South Coast and Illawarra.
- It is the inherent values of the land itself, rather than the agricultural activity which it supports that determines the BSAL classification.
- The exhibited maps are regional-scale and identify where BSAL is likely to occur.

WHY HAVE WE MAPPED BSAL?

- Identifying and mapping this land is critical to managing the potential land use conflicts which arise from the proximity of high-quality agricultural land and mining and coal seam gas (CSG) activity in some parts of the State.
- In 2012, some 1.74 million hectares of BSAL was mapped in the Upper Hunter and New England North West regions.
- Now, approximately one million hectares of additional BSAL has been mapped in the remaining areas of the State and is on exhibition.

WHAT WILL THE MAPS BE USED FOR?

- Any State significant mining or coal seam gas proposal on BSAL has to go through an additional level of scrutiny via the Gateway process – an independent, upfront and scientific

Strategic Regional Land Use Policy



assessment of the land and water impacts of the proposal.

- The Gateway assessment is conducted by an independent panel of scientific experts before a development application can be lodged (see FAQ – Introduction of Gateway Process & Gateway Panel).
- Of the 2.8 million hectares of mapped BSAL, about ten per cent overlays a known mining or CSG resource.
- In addition, a State significant mining or CSG proposal on BSAL must be referred to the Commonwealth Independent Expert Scientific Committee and the NSW Minister for Primary Industries for advice on potential water resource impacts.

HOW WAS BSAL IDENTIFIED?

- Agricultural land across the State was assessed against specific **scientific criteria** – levels of soil fertility, land and soil capability classes and access to reliable water and rainfall levels.
- The assessment was conducted in consultation with key industry representatives and industry experts.
- As this land is mapped at a broad regional scale there may be circumstances in which the maps do not fully reflect the existence of BSAL on the ground.
- A site verification process has been introduced to confirm whether a specific site does, in fact, contain BSAL, before proceeding through the Gateway process.
- A protocol for site verification has been developed and is available on the Department of Planning & Infrastructure's website at: www.planning.nsw.gov.au/srlup

WHAT IS THE COMMONWEALTH'S ROLE IN BSAL?

- The NSW and the Australian Governments have agreed on a referral protocol under the National Partnership Agreement on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development.
- This will ensure all State significant mining and CSG project decisions in NSW that could have a significant impact on a water resource will be made considering the advice of the Commonwealth's Independent Expert Scientific Committee (CIESC).
- All State significant mining and CSG projects on BSAL will be referred to the CIESC as part of the Gateway process. All other State significant projects (not on BSAL) that are likely to have a significant impact on water resources will be referred as part of the development assessment process.

Strategic Regional Land Use Policy



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR STRATEGIC LAND USE PLANS?

- Strategic Regional Land Use Plans (SRLUPs) for the Central West, Southern Highlands and other areas of the State were initially proposed to be completed by 2015.
- It is now proposed that Regional Growth Plans under the new planning system are prepared for these areas, rather than Strategic Regional Land Use Plans (SRLUPs).
- The mapping of BSAL – a key component of these plans - is now on exhibition.
- These Regional Growth Plans will provide a comprehensive framework for managing growth and natural resources in regional areas.
- Similar to the SRLUPs, they will continue to have a strong focus on the protection of high-quality agricultural land.
- The plans will be developed with local community and stakeholder participation.

WHEN WILL BSAL MAPS COME INTO FORCE?

- Once this exhibition concludes and community and stakeholder submissions have been assessed, the BSAL maps will be given legal effect through an amendment to the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries) 2007* (Mining SEPP).
- Thereafter, the Gateway process will apply to mining or CSG proposals on all verified BSAL across the State.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

- The maps and accompanying report will be on exhibition until **8 November 2013**.
- They may be viewed on the Department of Planning & Infrastructure website at: www.planning.nsw.gov.au/srlup
- If you have queries about the mapping please telephone 1300 305 695.

SUBMITTING COMMENTS

- Comments can be made up until **8 November 2013**:
 - online at www.planning.nsw.gov.au/proposals

Strategic Regional Land Use Policy



- by email to srlup@planning.nsw.gov.au
- by mail to Director, Assessment Policy, Systems & Stakeholder Engagement, Department of Planning and Infrastructure GPO Box 39, SYDNEY NSW 2001.
- Comments will be made publicly available and will be published online at www.planning.nsw.gov.au/proposals

FURTHER INFORMATION

- To find out more, including our policy on publishing submissions, go to www.planning.nsw.gov.au/srlup, call 1300 305 695 or email information@planning.nsw.gov.au
- To find out more about the Strategic Regional Land Use Policy which aims to protect strategic agricultural land from the potential impacts of mining and coal seam gas activity visit:

Department of Planning & Infrastructure website:

www.planning.nsw.gov.au/srlup

Coal Seam Gas website:

www.csg.nsw.gov.au

NSW Government Strategic Regional Land Use website:

www.nsw.gov.au/strategicregionallanduse