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### **Leard Forest clearing banned during sensitive months**

The Department of Planning and Environment has approved Whitehaven Coal's new environmental plan for Maules Creek Coal Mine, which stops trees in Leard State Forest being cleared during the most sensitive wildlife hibernation and nesting months.

The Department has welcomed the mining company's changes to the plan, which incorporate advice from the Office of Environment and Heritage to strengthen environmental protections and address community concerns.

"The new plan is a sensible, balanced outcome that allows construction work on the mine, which will employ up to 470 people full-time, to continue while ensuring vulnerable wildlife is protected," a Department spokesperson said.

"The community raised concerns over plans to clear trees in Leard Forest during times wildlife was particularly vulnerable.

"The new plan approved by the Department addresses those concerns."

Whitehaven submitted a plan for the Department's approval in late August, which the Department determined did not provide adequate protections for wildlife.

Based on recommendations from the Office of Environment and Heritage a number of important changes have now been made.

This includes restricting clearing to between the 15 February and 30 April to avoid affecting animals during the spring and early summer breeding and roosting periods, as well during winter's hibernation months.

As well as preventing clearing in sensitive months, the plan includes a number of measures to ensure work to build the mine affects wildlife as little as possible:

- staging clearing so that only the minimum number of trees needed to allow mining planned for the next year to occur are cleared
- compulsory supervision by licensed wildlife carers and ecologists, who will have the wellbeing of the animals as their top priority
- banning clearing when temperatures exceed 35°C so animals do not have to relocate to other trees in extreme temperatures
- carrying out detailed inspections of trees before they are removed to identify any animals that will be affected
- relocating any animals that could be disturbed by clearing
- radio tracking of relocated animals to provide a greater understanding of the effect of relocation on animals to benefit this and other future projects.

The spokesperson said that the written consent of the Secretary of the Department will be required if the company wants to carry out limited clearing in exceptional circumstances.

“The Department has made it clear that approval will not be granted if the request contradicts the spirit of the plan and the commitment it represents to the community,” the spokesperson said.

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