McPhillamys Gold Project

#16 Biodiversity and land management

Minimising impacts on and around the project site

During the design of the McPhillamys project, every effort was made to avoid and minimise impacts on the local environment.

Extensive ecological investigations were carried out between 2013 and 2019 to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the project area's biodiversity.

Terrestrial biodiversity

The McPhillamys site has a long history of pastoral use and mainly comprises open paddocks with some fragmented patches of timbered natural vegetation scattered throughout.

The majority of the area is open grassland of varying condition and quality. Most parts of the site have been heavily impacted by pastoral activities and are dominated by exotic (introduced) plant species.

Native vegetation and fauna habitat

A number of areas within the overall site are of high conservation value.

Wherever possible, these areas have been avoided when designing the project.

Following all measures to avoid, minimise and mitigate impacts, the mine development will still result in the removal of approximately 132 hectares of native vegetation and fauna habitat.

Removal of these areas will be carefully managed in order to relocate fauna where possible.

Compensating for lost habitat

Regis will compensate for the loss of native vegetation and habitat areas through an offset plan. An offset plan can include:

- Purchasing and protecting another site (which is then managed permanently under what is called a stewardship agreement); and/or
- Buying biodiversity offset credits via an established government credit register; and/or
- Payment into the Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

Above:

Open grassland in the McPhillamys project area.

The majority of the McPhillamys site has been impacted by pastoral activities and is dominated by exotic (introduced) plant species.

Aquatic ecology

The assessment found aquatic habitat in the mine project area is unlikely to support threatened species habitat, due to the current condition of the Belubula River.

There is a low level of connectivity between pools and the waterway is already highly disturbed.

Notwithstanding this, the majority of surveyed sites were still classified as highly sensitive (Type 1) key fish habitat due to the presence of aquatic habitat features.

The mine development will result in the removal of some of the key fish habitat within the disturbance footprint.

An aquatic ecology offset program will therefore be required to offset negligible losses so that there is a net gain in aquatic biodiversity outcomes from the development.

Aziel West—potential offset land

Regis has purchased a property near Blayney, Aziel West, for a potential offset or stewardship site. Aziel West has large areas supporting Box Gum Woodland that meet the conditions in accordance with government criteria for offsets. And a recent survey found evidence of Koalas on the site.

What is an offset site?

An offset site is land of conservation value which is purchased and protected permanently in order to make up for land which would be disturbed by development (in this case, mining activities).

If the McPhillamys project is approved, the Aziel West property could form part of the offsets required for the project.

That means it would be protected and conserved permanently for future generations, under a biodiversity stewardship agreement.

What will the land be used for?

A stewardship agreement for Aziel West would ensure that the only activities permitted for the land would be ones which protect and improve the native vegetation and habitat value – such as tree planting, weed and pest control.

Below:
Aerial image of the Aziel West property, purchased by Regis for permanent environmental protection.

Rehabilitation of McPhillamys

The areas to be disturbed by mining activities will be progressively rehabilitated during mining operations and after the mine has closed.

The aim is to rehabilitate the site for agricultural (grazing) land use. The upper slopes of the final void will be shaped at an angle to ensure a safe and stable landform remains, post mining.

Progress on rehabilitation will be monitored annually and the results must be reported to the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment in the annual review.

Final rehabilitation requirements will be developed as part of a detailed closure plan, which must be produced within five years of closure in consultation with government, councils and the community.

Protecting local water supplies

Regis proposes to bring process water to the site from the Lithgow area via a 90km pipeline, so the project would not need to compete with landholders for local water supplies.

The project's water management system is designed to prevent any discharge of the process-affected water offsite.

The system also includes a series of clean water diversions to minimise the amount of clean water flowing into the mine disturbance footprint. This will capture rain water, divert it around the site and place it back into the Belubula River, below the site.

For more information about the McPhillamys Gold Project you can view the Development Application and Environmental Impact Statements documents at: https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/project/9821