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Pilliga Forest rehabilitation continues as Santos announces new water facility

Santos today confirmed it will seek State Government approval to construct new purpose-built water treatment facilities for its ongoing coal seam gas operations in the Pilliga State Forest. The new state-of-the-art facility will enable Santos to move its existing water treatment plant and associated water storage ponds out of the Pilliga Forest.

“Santos has committed to the community that we will operate at a high standard, and the most effective way to do that over the long term is to build a new water treatment plant. This will be the best solution from a long-term environmental perspective and is a major component of our new plan for the Pilliga and our operations,” said Sam Crafter, Santos’ Manager of Community and Government Relations.

A thorough review of the existing water treatment facilities at the Bibblewindi site in the Pilliga found they did not meet Santos’ standards, with the company concerned about the integrity of the facilities. The water treatment plant, which was shut down soon after Santos acquired the operations from Eastern Star Gas, had a history of operational problems and failures since installation. The associated water storage ponds are unsuitable for long-term utilisation and Santos is committed to rehabilitating these sites. As a precautionary measure, additional monitoring devices are being installed. These will remain in place until the stored water can be transferred to the new facility, after which the Bibblewindi ponds can be removed and the site rehabilitated.

The new water treatment facilities will be located outside the Pilliga Forest. This will result in a substantial reduction in the scale of operations needed in the Pilliga, a more comprehensive remediation of the Bibblewindi site and reduced vehicle movements in the forest. The new facilities will be built to the highest standard to safeguard the environment.

Subject to community consultation and government approval, Santos plans to locate the new water treatment plant together with the associated water storage ponds at Leewood, a property owned by Santos south of Narrabri along the Newell Highway.

To date Santos has committed more than \$17 million to remediation works and substantial remediation and rehabilitation progress has been made.

“Extensive testing has been carried out and site specific rehabilitation plans prepared to ensure each site is successfully remediated,” said Mr Crafter.

“Gathering this information, preparing and scoping the work, procurement of appropriately qualified contractors and execution of the work takes time, but we are committed to completing the rehabilitation properly.”

When the Pilliga remediation work is completed:

- Eight water storage facilities will have been removed and the sites remediated.
- More than 20 existing lease sites will have been rehabilitated including the removal of many disused sumps.
- Six over-cleared sites will have been rehabilitated.
- More than 30 wells will have been decommissioned and rehabilitated.

Mr Crafter said: “We know that our activities can have minimal impact and can be suitable in an environment like the Pilliga, but it requires facilities to be of a high standard. These latest plans will result in a substantial reduction in the scale of water treatment operations in the Pilliga and will allow Santos to substantially escalate the remediation of the area.”

Santos will recommence drilling activity early in the new year as it begins the previously announced exploration program. Extensive community consultation will be conducted and full government approvals obtained prior to the commencement of activity.

Ends.