

Media enquiries

Chandran Vigneswaran
+61 8 8116 5856 / +61 (0) 467 775 055
chandran.vigneswaran@santos.com

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Santos' New South Wales exploration program approved by Commonwealth

Santos has welcomed the Commonwealth's determination that it is satisfied the company's planned exploration and appraisal program near Narrabri will not have a harmful impact on water resources or other Commonwealth Matters of National Environmental Significance.

In late June, Santos submitted the program to the Commonwealth, as a referral under the EPBC Act, to determine whether the exploration was deemed likely to have a significant impact on the environment, or more specifically be of a scale to activate the 'water trigger', under new amendments to the Act.

"Although our own independent assessment indicated the exploration program would not activate the 'water trigger', we wanted to be completely transparent with regard to our initial exploration and appraisal program," said spokesperson Sam Crafter.

"We believed the referral was the sensible way to ensure the predicted impacts on water resources had been thoroughly assessed by all the relevant bodies."

Santos' referred program involves the drilling of 15 new appraisal wells, recommencement of existing pilot wells, construction of associated flowlines and operation of approved water storage facilities, in the Narrabri area in northwest NSW.

The company also asked that the impact of all historic operations, activities and clearing carried out by previous operators in the Pilliga be assessed as part of the cumulative impact of the program. The decision confirmed there has not been a significant impact on any matters of national environmental significance as a result of these previous activities.

"We acknowledge the Commonwealth's robust assessment process and the strict conditions they have imposed to ensure the impact is not significant. The decision is a clear indication that the regulator does not see the referred work program as having a significant environmental impact.

"Having already received the necessary State approvals for the first stage of the exploration and appraisal program, this Commonwealth decision will allow us to proceed."

Ends.