

FAQS



HAZELWOOD POWER STATION & MINE

PONDAGE

You closed the Hazelwood Pondage for “safety reasons” but nothing has happened. Why can't you reopen it to the public?

On 1 June 2018, we were given preliminary findings of a study by independent experts into the integrity of the Pondage walls. Those findings indicated the walls were unsafe. In view of those findings, we took immediate action and initiated a third party peer review of those preliminary findings, temporarily closed the Pondage to mitigate any risk to the public, reduced the water level immediately to reduce pressure on the dam walls and engaged with regulators, nearby landowners and the community.

Are there any other options?

The consultant's initial report says there is a need to reduce the pressure on the embankment walls. To do so, the water level needs to be lowered. By how much is still to be determined by the experts. There are only two other options, other than this - complete draining of the Pondage or extensive repair work in the order of tens of millions of dollars.

How far has the water level dropped since you started releasing water?

Water discharges from the Pondage have been to minimise the impacts to downstream land users. Approval has been sought from the Environment Protection Authority to increase water flows above normal licence limits. Since June 2018, the Pondage water level has been reduced by 400mm.

It is envisaged the water will have been dropped by a metre at/or around mid-August if current dry weather conditions continue.

Is it safe?

The structure remains safe; we have taken action to mitigate the risk to the community by temporarily closing the Pondage and reducing the water level. We have pro-actively increased our weekly visual inspections to daily. Our early warning systems remain operational and we also continue monitoring through the use of real time GPS and survey prisms. Our Trigger Action Response Plan within the Dam Emergency Response Plan has also been updated.

Why didn't you detect this problem earlier?

Since ENGIE took over the site, we have been monitoring the infrastructure in the Pondage on a monthly basis, using our employees and independent consultants, with an independent annual inspection also being carried out. This monitoring is in accordance with ANCOLD guidelines.

The ANCOLD guidelines were changed in March 2017. These guidelines included more advanced methods of analysis. As a result, we initiated a detailed and extensive geo-technical study of the embankments in 2017. The preliminary findings of this study were given to ENGIE on 25 May 2018 and indicated there are two possible risks associated with the dam walls which need further investigation. In the interim, we are taking the precaution of temporarily closing the Pondage and lowering the water levels to reduce pressure on the dam walls.

Who is ANCOLD and are you required to comply with their guidelines?

The Australian National Committee On Large Dams. This body sets the guidelines for all dams in Australia, a requirement of Southern Rural Water, the regulator for the Pondage.

What are the new ANCOLD guidelines that you need to comply with?

There are a number of guidelines covering many topics with which ENGIE must comply (Dam Management, Flood, Risk, etc). Revised guidelines were released in March 2017. These guidelines included more advanced methods of analysis. As a result, we initiated a detailed and extensive geo-technical study of the embankments in 2017.

What is the worst case scenario for the Pondage?

The worst case scenario is for an earthquake of 6 or more magnitude to occur directly under the Pondage area. If that did occur, we would then enact our emergency response plan.

What is the highest level earthquake we have had in the area?

In 2012, there was a 5.4 magnitude quake in the Moe area.



What does a slow leak look like should it occur?

Water would be evident along the base of the dam embankments and this water would make its way into Eel Hole Creek.

What would a dam wall collapse look like?

This is dependent on the failure trigger and failure mode. It could be a relatively quick failure via an earthquake or a slower failure via piping, which is essentially a slow leak.

If the dam wall breaks, what will be its flood path?

Engineering reports indicate that gradual seepage would occur and there would be a slow release of water. The consultants have provided detailed Dam Break Analysis maps which we have shared with our neighbours whom may be impacted.

What is the possibility of the dam walls failing before you get the final report?

We have started to lower the water level and reduce the pressure on the dam walls to mitigate this risk.

What are you doing to ensure the safety of the community?

We have proactively increased our weekly visual inspections to daily and our early warning system, which indicates high water flows into Eel Hole Creek, remains in place. Our Trigger Action Response Plan within the Dam Emergency Response Plan has also been updated. A real time survey monitoring device is also in place on the Eel Hole Creek embankment wall. Prisms are used to monitor the Switchback Road embankment with information collected and recorded monthly.

Why can't you spend the money to fix it?

The future of the Pondage has been the subject of extensive stakeholder engagement. We have been open and transparent in saying our preferred option is to use the water from this former operational asset to assist in filling the Mine pit. As part of our mining licence and Mine Work Plan Variation, we are required to remediate and rehabilitate the Pondage as part of our closure activities.