



Thursday, November 01 2018

Hazelwood Pondage temporary closure to continue

ENGIE Hazelwood will lower the level of the water in the Hazelwood Pondage by a further 1.7 metres following the final report of independent consultants into the integrity of the pondage walls.

The pondage will remain closed until this level is reached, most likely early in 2019, when a decision will be made on its future.

The pondage has been temporarily closed since June this year when a preliminary report from independent dam consultants raised serious concerns about the safety of the community, should the walls fail. Action to mitigate the risk by reducing the pressure on the dam walls started immediately by gradually lowering the water level by one metre.

ENGIE Hazelwood said in June that a decision on the future of the pondage would be made once the final report was received from the consultants at GHD and third-party reviewed by consultants, Golder.

The final report confirms the pondage walls have deteriorated significantly with age since they were constructed in the 1960s and no longer comply with requirements of the Australian National Committee for Large Dams (ANCOLD). A further drop in the water level by an additional 1.7 metres will significantly reduce pressure on the dam walls.

Hazelwood Rehabilitation Project Director, Tony Innocenzi, said he understood users of the pondage would be disappointed.

“As the owner of the pondage, we must manage the significant risk to the community and environment, while considering the best decision for the business,” Mr Innocenzi said.

“We have engaged with the main user of the pondage, Latrobe Valley Yacht Club as well as Latrobe City Council in the hope of finding a suitable alternative for the club’s activities.”

The pondage was initially built by the State Electricity Commission more than 57 years ago to circulate and cool water for reuse in the power station’s thermal water cycle. Designed and built to last approximately 30 years, it is subject to design and management guidelines stipulated by ANCOLD.

The detailed study of the pondage found the moisture content within the materials used to construct the dam embankment wall structures is very high. High moisture content could result in what is known as piping where seepage causes internal erosion within the dam wall. When this occurs to a significant level, it could result in a dam break flow, which could impact a number of downstream assets and properties.



It also means that the pondage walls could fail if there is a “reasonably strong” earthquake of a magnitude of over six at the cooling pond site.

Dropping the current water level by a further 1.7 metres would start once approval was received from the Environment Protection Authority to release additional water into Eel Hole Creek.

Mr Innocenzi said ENGIE Hazelwood would continue to engage with the community and other stakeholders regarding the pondage.

“Rehabilitation of the exposed beached areas of the pondage will commence to mitigate any impact to the community through dust,” he said.

“Removal of any waste materials or objects which may be exposed through the reduction in the water level will also be cleared away to ensure public safety.”

Early warning systems, including monitoring through the use of GPS units and prisms, remain in place and will alert ENGIE Hazelwood personnel immediately to any movement.

Mr Innocenzi said regular visual inspections of the pondage walls were put in place when the pondage was temporarily closed and would continue until the water level drops by a further 1.7 metres and the risk of failure was mitigated.

Real time survey monitoring is also in place on the embankment walls of both Eel Hole Creek and Switchback Road.

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