



Ensham expands

By RUTH MILES-BROWN

ENSHAM Mine outside Emerald has the potential to become one of Queensland's largest thermal coal exporters, with plans for a major expansion of the mining operation.

In an announcement made yesterday afternoon, Ensham Resources stated its intentions to extend open cut mining and develop an underground longwall mine as part of the Ensham Central Project.

Ensham Resources general manager of development Peter Smith said the company was in the early stages of investigating the extension of open cut mining in the central area of the existing mine and the later development of a new high capacity underground longwall mine, adjacent to the existing operations.

When expanded, it is predicted the operation will provide employment for more than 700 people at the mine, while the project itself has the potential to produce up to 20 million tonnes of coal annually over a period of 20 years.

This would result in a substantial increase of capacity, more than doubling current production of 8 million tonnes a year.

"This project could become a major export earner for the state of Queensland and could provide a significant long term boost to the development of the Central Highlands region," Mr Smith said.

Prior to undertaking the expansion, Ensham is commissioning an independent Environmental Impact Statement and social impact assessment of the project to explore any environmental impacts and effects on the region's social and cultural environment.

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Mr Smith said they had been in discussions with key stakeholders over the past few weeks, including Emerald and Peak Downs shire councils and neighbouring landowners, in an effort to inform them first hand.

“We feel it is time now for more public recognition of where we are going,” he said.

The approvals process will continue over the next few years, with the commencement of the open cut expansion as part of the first stage of the Ensham Central Project expected by 2007.

Mr Smith said at the same time, preliminary work would then begin on the underground development with the expectation of producing in the order of 20 million tonnes annually by 2009.

“We are in the very, very early stages,” he said.

“But it’s important people know what our plans are.”