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Perdaman, which last year struck a preliminary 20-year deal with Santos for supplies from Narrabri, expects up to 700 jobs will be created in constructing the plant, with 100-200 ongoing roles. A first-phase study of the project will be completed by August 7, with a formal engineering and design process to be activated should the IPC recommend Narrabri to the NSW government by its September 4 deadline.

A final investment decision will be made by December 2021 with a three-year construction period to bring the facility online. The fertiliser chief has previously said Perdaman could redirect the investment to other international destinations including New Zealand, Indonesia or the Middle East if Narrabri gets knocked back.

Perdaman will this week complete a design and engineering study on its planned $US1.8bn ($1.52bn) ammonium nitrate plant near the rural NSW town that could either supply fertiliser for agribusiness or explosives for the state’s mining industry.

With the NSW Independent Planning Commission wrapping up the final day of a week-long public hearing on Saturday, Perdaman said it was confident gas could be safely extracted from underground coal seams, with the project offering a rare opportunity to build a new industrial base in the region.

“We desperately need to build a bigger manufacturing industry here in Australia,” Perdaman managing director Vikas Rambal told The Weekend Australian.

“COVID-19 has taught us an economic lesson that we can’t always rely on imports and if we can get enough supplies of gas through Narrabri, it can help build value-added industries that we didn’t have before.”

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there's going to be a shortfall and we need to supply gas to our customers. That's why Narrabri is so critical.

"The other advantage is it's so close. So the cost of supplying Narrabri gas to the Sydney market is much less than the price of receiving it from Queensland."

Opponents are concerned about the development's potential impact on groundwater and the surrounding agriculture, with the coal-seam gas project receiving a record 23,000 submissions on its environmental impact statement.

The NSW Department of Planning approved Narrabri in June after a three-year process, with the IPC now midway through its own assessment, including a two-day site visit and a presentation by Santos to planning commissioners.

The IPC quizzed Santos over the likely pipeline route to deliver gas to market should it be successful, the expected carbon emissions from gas wells, the risk of an extreme weather event disrupting ponds where salt from the gas extraction process will be stored, and whether Narrabri will lead to lower gas prices for the state.