

Submission to Planning Assessment Commission Review

Wilpinjong Extension Project RO39-16

Deadline: Monday 5 December 2016

Lodge on line at: <http://www.pac.nsw.gov.au/projects/2016/02/blank-please-use-for-next-review>

Or email to Att David Kloppers at: pac@pac.nsw.gov.au

Background on Wilpinjong Extension Project

Wilpinjong Coal Mine is a 28 km² open cut in south east Hunter catchment between Goulburn River National Park and Mungohorn Gap Nature Reserve. The mine expansion proposes to destroy a further 800 ha, extend the mine's life until 2033 to extract another 95 Mt coal and bring the mine to within 1.5km of the village of Wollar.

It will remove 354 ha of remnant native vegetation impacting 24 threatened species, destroy significant regional cultural heritage sites and further impact on surrounding creeks and rivers.

The approval will be the death knell of the Wollar Village and leave remaining landholders on the edge of mine own land isolated and under threat from natural emergencies.

Key Points: Comments on Department of Planning & Environment (DPE) Assessment Report

I object to the extension of Wilpinjong Mine and urge the PAC to recommend against its approval

1. Social Impacts

DPE has incorrectly concluded that the population of the Wollar district will continue to decline even if the mine extension was not approved. This position is not based on any evidence. There are great opportunities for the Wollar community to bounce back if the mine is not extended.

DPE & Social Impact Assessment have failed to recognise the significance of impacts on remaining residents outside Wollar village including increased isolation, loss of emergency services and stranded assets.

The Voluntary Payment Agreement with Mid-Western Regional Council will not mitigate predicted impacts such as the loss of the local shop and less Bushfire Brigade volunteers with local knowledge.

2. Noise & Dust

Noise has been the biggest impact from the mine. There was no assessment of Low Frequency Noise (LFN) impacts of the current mine or the proposed extension.

EPA noise monitoring conducted in June 2016 demonstrated that LFN is an issue. The noise assessment must be redone to include LFN predictions.

The proposal to shift \$42m of noise mitigation costs onto community health impacts is irresponsible and should not be approved.

Dust emissions are predicted to increase and exceed the 24 hr PM10 criteria. Protecting community health should be a prime consideration of decision-makers.

3. Biodiversity

The proposal will have a cumulative impact on threatened species habitat that cannot be offset.

The Biodiversity Offsets will not meet the requirements for the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater. It is not acceptable for current mine rehabilitation to be counted as an offset.

The proposal to open cut the very narrow valleys protruding into the Mugnhorn Gap Nature Reserve without buffers should not be approved.

4. Aboriginal Cultural Heritage

The proposed destruction of an ochre quarry and Aboriginal artwork on Rocky Hill should not be approved. The mine extension will destroy 92 artefact sites and put another 138 at risk.

The Office of Environment and Heritage has identified that the cumulative impacts of mining on cultural heritage is approaching unacceptable thresholds in the region.

5. Final Voids

All final voids should be backfilled. The argument that a third void in Pit 8 is necessary because it will cost \$15m to backfill is ridiculous. This cost shifting onto the environment must stop.

6. Peabody finances

Peabody Energy is bankrupt in America. It is unlikely that they have any capital to spend on expansion of Australian projects. This must be a key consideration.

The DPE report identifies that benefits of the project include \$172.5m of direct capital investment. The report also states that the development decision relates to the 'land' not the 'person'.

However, all the public benefits including employment predictions and investment relate directly to Peabody and their proposal under assessment. The economic analysis and public benefit predictions are an essential part of the decision and cannot be separated from the applicant.

7. Climate change

Australia is now a formal signatory to the Paris agreement to minimise global warming to no more than 2°. The project is estimated to produce 20.4 Mt greenhouse gases per year until 2033.

If approved Wilpinjong will become the largest coal mine in NSW. It is against the principle of inter-generational equity to approve more coal extraction under the threat of substantive economic, social and environmental harm caused by climate change.

8. Justification for mine

Wilpinjong Mine was developed in 2006 to provide 80% of coal requirements for Bayswater & Liddell Power Stations until 2026. The current approval can meet these contractual obligations.

The extension project is not required to ensure security of coal-fired power supply in NSW.

9. Planning Process

There has been unfair access to information for the proponent during the assessment process.

The community has only had access to the DPE assessment report & expert review reports since 7 November with one month to make submissions.

Peabody Energy has been provided opportunities to review and respond to the additional expert reviews throughout the assessment process and prior to the public release of reports.