

## PAC submission – Scott Willis

To the Chairman and Members of the Commission - thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Although I am employed by EnergyAustralia at the Mt Piper Power Station (which will be directly affected by the Commission's decision), **I speak today as a person born and raised in Lithgow, a rate payer, the father of 2 children, and as one who is concerned for the future of this; our town.**

For the following reasons I feel **qualified** to speak today and I believe that by fleshing out the details of my life in Lithgow I can demonstrate the devastating effect that a negative decision will bring to bear on this and the surrounding communities;

Both of my parents (now retired) earned their living (or at least a major part of it) from Coal and coal-dependent Industries;

- **Mum** was in payroll at a local coal mine; and
- **Dad** owned and ran a local printery a substantial part of whose business was to supply goods to the Coal Industry and other small businesses who also relied on coal

Upon leaving school, I **gained employment in a coal mine and a trade as an electrician.**

When I left the coalmines for medical reasons (which were unrelated to my employment), I was able to **fund my university studies with money I had earned whilst an apprentice** and with the support of my parents (whom as I said, earned their livings from coal.

I also know of many other locals who have been able to fund their further studies thanks to their employment in, and support from, the coal industry.

I then became a Local Government and Planning Lawyer (which relevantly included a substantial environmental law component) and practiced for 5 years in the Land and Environment Court.

I decided to return to Lithgow because I viewed it as a better place to live than in the city and in which to raise my kids. For 10 years, I ran a business here where we employed 10 local people – all of them rate payers. A substantial part of our trade was supplying goods to the coal industry and related enterprises.

I then worked in general practice for a local firm of solicitors where a significant portion of our clients were coalminers and their families.

I have now been employed at the Mt Piper Power Station for over 5 years and am currently the Business Systems, Compliance and Property Lead.

Although my circumstances are unique to me, there are a great many people in Lithgow and the surrounding communities whose lives are equally inter-woven and reliant on coal and other related industries and a great many more whose lives are totally dependent upon it.

I don't intend to cover the environmental aspects of this proposal however I believe it is important to remember that it has been designed to meet the conditions of consent of an existing planning approval.

The science speaks for itself on whether or not this proposal will create a better outcome for the environment.

I believe it does.

I would like however to talk about the economic impact that a negative decision would have on the area.

Coal and related industries are the foundation for employment in Lithgow and the surrounding communities.

#### **Direct Employment will be drastically affected by an adverse decision**

In addition to the obvious loss of positions for full time staff, casuals, fixed termers and contract labour, there will be affects for generations to come.

One only has to look at the yearly intake of apprentices.

I recall when I left school (admittedly some time ago now), everybody who wanted one, got a job.

- Small Arms Factory (around 1000 employees now approximately 120 staff) had yearly intake of around 40-50 apprentices across all trades, now just a handful;
- Power Stations; had a dedicated apprentice training school with a yearly intake of around 20 apprentices (now 4, some years it is less);
- Combined coal mines yearly intake was in the order of 20 apprentices (now it is substantially less);
- The railways also employed quite a few, but no longer to the same extent.

So there were in the order of 100 apprenticeships in Lithgow per year not counting local electricians/plumbers/carpenters/motor mechanics, many of whom would have received their trade from coal and related industries. Now it is just a handful. If this proposal is not approved the situation then becomes much worse

Indeed my own nephew could not get any work in the area and was forced to move away. He was named Apprentice of the Year at the 2016 Master Builders New South Wales Excellence in Construction Awards in November.

He is just one example of many bright young kids who are forced to leave their country or regional homes due to lack of work. In my experience, they are usually lost forever.

To refuse this application will only serve to exacerbate this drain on our community's future potential.

### **Indirect Employment will be drastically affected by an adverse decision**

Obviously the devastation caused to our community by a negative decision would extend beyond those directly employed at Springvale or the Power Station.

During my time as a proprietor of a local business I have witnessed and been impacted by mine closures in the district. Job losses in the pits equals job losses in other businesses.

It happened in my business and it happens in other businesses - whether or not they deal directly with the coalmines. Car dealers, restaurants and cafes, clothes shops, hairdressers. It's like a snowball effect.

While Lithgow is trying hard and slowly succeeding in diversifying away from its total reliance on industry, it can't do that without a solid platform upon which to build. Coal and coal related industries provide that platform.

I'd like to now turn to other contributions to the community from coal and related industries (which includes not only the big players like EnergyAustralia and Westfund but a host of small businesses which derive all or some of their revenue from the coal industry).

They are too numerous to mention by name but include;

- Sporting Sponsorships spanning individuals, teams and entire competitions; (for example, the recent Centennial Coal Cup rugby league competition);
- Donations to community groups, clubs and not-for-profit organisations (for example, PCYC, Royal North Shore Hospital Cancer Fund, Careflight and the Smith Family);
- Patronage of the Arts of cultural activities (for example, the yearly Ironfest and Halloween festivals that bring thousands of visitors to the area). The flow on for retail, accommodation and hospitality being both obvious and substantial;
- Environmental Projects and volunteering (for example, staff tree planting days and roadside clean-ups).
- Education; (for example, donations to school award giving ceremonies, vocational training (try-a-trade etc.) and other special programmes including support and tutelage for Lithgow High's entry into state-wide Robotics Competition)

In summary, if the proposal is rejected then there will major job losses in the District (both direct and indirect) and many families, such as my own, will be forced to sell-up (probably at a loss given resultant market over supply) and move away. Thank you for your time.