

RE: KEPCO Bylong mine proposal

Dear Commissioners,

I write in the hope that a tragic outcome for NSW can be avoided.

I refer to the application by Korean corporation KEPCO to establish a new coal mine in the Bylong Valley.

In a drought that is shaping up to be the worst on record, I believe WATER is the key issue here. Coal mines are temporary while farming should be permanent, but the damage a coal mine would inflict on this beautiful valley IS permanent.

The narrow picturesque valley, as you may know, is blessed with alluvial soil that has built up over thousands of years. While the river and creeks often run dry, a reliable aquifer runs a few metres below the surface.

This provides enough irrigation to make this farmland productive even in dry times. However it is not inexhaustible, so the local farmers often roster their irrigation to avoid running it dry.

The proposed coal mine, on the other hand, will have two open cut pits 50–90 metres deep which will divert underground water and likely depressurise the main aquifer and prevent irrigation. On top of this, the mine will consume water 24/7. Then the toxified waste-water has to be disposed of, creating a further threat to Hunter catchment lands and waterways.

With the profits going to Korea, the only local benefits would be some jobs and some royalties for state coffers, and I do understand the need for this income.

But while KEPCO claims there would be 450 jobs, they do not break this figure down into construction mode vs operational mode. Locals believe this highly automated operation will employ only 45 or 50 people on an ongoing basis – about the same number who worked on the farms KEPCO has bought, and who have been evicted.

If you add the heavy trucks that will constantly stream down this winding rural road, and the extra diesel coal trains that will ply back and forth to the port for decades, the damage to this part of our state will be tragic.

This personally affects me as I live next to the coal line into the Newcastle port. I do not want more fume-belching locos and screeching train wheels reducing my local amenity all day and night.

I'm sure you are aware of the many other arguments against this project – the damage extra coal pollution will do to the atmosphere, increased global warming with its further risk of bushfires, droughts and severe weather, the Indigenous Wiradjuri heritage sites among the scenic sandstone bluffs lining the valley, the risk of undermining these bluffs with the underground portion of the mine, and the poor record of coal companies rehabilitating the land after they have closed mines. I believe these negatives are too high a price to pay for a few temporary jobs and a temporary royalty stream.

I also note the ongoing ratchet effect on politics when such mines are approved, as big corporations like KEPCO are in a position to make large donations to political parties, while those affected by the mine are not. This is clearly unfair.

In case you have reservations about the climate dangers of coal, please look up 'global warming fire chiefs' and reflect on your responsibility to communities increasingly threatened by wildfires.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Gormly