



mudgee district
environment group

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Bylong Coal Mine Project Submission of Objection 7th November 2018

Mudgee District Environment Group (MDEG)

Presentation to the Independent Planning Commission

Mudgee District Environment Group members are asking the Independent Planning Commission to reject this coal mine project to preserve the agricultural, biodiversity, conservation and scenic values of the Bylong Valley.

I have been tasked with raising some of the inadequacies of the revised mine plan and other relevant issues of concern.

The Commission previously found that the landscape of the Bylong Valley would be substantially and permanently altered by the mine. "Any approval of the project would represent a fundamental shift in the valley in favour of mining as opposed to agricultural or pastoral pursuits, and that the water security on which agricultural activities depend, may be jeopardised, particularly during extended dry periods."

It is our belief that neither the revision of the mine plan or the further information provided by the proponent adequately alleviates these and other concerns:

Tarwyn Park

Even with the revised mine plan Tarwyn Park will be subject to the worst of the alluvial water drawdown. The state heritage significance of this valued farm is dependent on the availability of water and the ongoing process of natural sequence farming for its survival.

Heritage Council Advice

The findings of the independent report commissioned by the Heritage Council are not reflected in the Department of Planning's final assessment. Independent experts found that both Tarwyn Park and the broader Bylong Scenic Landscape qualified for State Heritage listing.

This is an important consideration and should not be ignored.

Rehabilitation

The Commission review was highly sceptical of the proponent's promises to rehabilitate this land saying that: "no mines in NSW have, to date, returned agricultural land or soil profiles to equivalence" with biophysical strategic agricultural land.

If water availability is not accurately researched and factored into the equation any attempt to reconstruct prime agricultural land on mine spoil will be unsuccessful. This needs to happen before the project is approved

Water

The Bylong river system is under great threat from this project proposal.

There is concern that permanent damage will be done to this important source of water for the remaining private irrigation industry in the Bylong Valley.

As the proponent admits, the Bylong River is known to flow underground through its alluvial aquifer. Coal mining in the valley will compromise the viability of the Bylong alluvium, the river and the Bylong River water source. All the water users and assets that rely on this water source will be adversely affected. The revised mine plan barely lessens the impact on the Bylong River which will occur through both drawdown and mine water requirements.

We agree with the Commission's review in 2017 that found it "difficult to accept the applicant's and the Department's assertions that there is a low probability of dry periods over the life of the mine, which would lead to impacts that only need to be identified and managed post approval."

The very severe drought conditions experienced now is a case in point.

We consider that the water model uses the Millennium Drought as its yardstick for extremely dry conditions and this is not valid. The drought of record for the Hunter and Goulburn Rivers was in the 1940s. Their model underestimates the impact of dry weather on the Bylong River system. Extreme climate events are not adequately captured in the water modelling. This is a weakness that should be addressed.

The assumptions used in water modelling for this project need to be independently reviewed. This has not been undertaken by the peer review conducted by the Department.

The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area

The Commonwealth Government is considering amending its listing advice for the Bylong coal project because the mine is on the edge of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and its groundwater drawdown will propagate into that National Park.

This impact has not been assessed in the material before the Commission and needs to be addressed before approval is given.

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage

The Commission review said "further investigation remains to be completed to properly assess the expected impacts to Aboriginal cultural heritage." No one has done this.

Office of Environment and Heritage's original view of the Wiradjuri heritage impacts of this mine was that "Notwithstanding the mitigation actions of previous mine projects and those of the proposed Bylong Coal project, OEH is concerned that harm to [Aboriginal cultural heritage] is approaching unacceptable thresholds for the region unless adequately balanced with a measured conservation gain. An imbalance of this scale may have permanent intergenerational consequences."¹

The cumulative impact of this mine on Wiradjuri heritage was raised as an issue but has not been addressed or treated seriously by the Department of Planning and the proponent.

¹ Preliminary Assessment Report Appendix D: OEH comments on response to submissions, 3 May 2016.
<https://majorprojects.accelo.com/public/af8d6bf2f5718d45541f0e932f702545/02.%20Bylong%20Coal%20Project%20-%20Preliminary%20Assessment%20Report%20-%20Appendix%20D.pdf>

Biodiversity and nature

The cumulative loss of critically endangered ecological communities and Regent Honeyeater habitat in the region has not been assessed. The three existing large mining operations to the west of the proposal have been approved to remove a very large extent of threatened vegetation and species habitat from the region. This mine will clear a further 691 hectares of native vegetation, including critically endangered woodland. Critically endangered ecosystems cannot be replaced with mine rehabilitation, yet that is what is proposed. Threatened species habitat in collapsed cliffs will be permanently lost. KEPCO's largest biodiversity "offset" area is over the underground mine and will itself be subject to subsidence and not secured until after mining is completed.

Climate Change

Australia and NSW have committed to meeting the Paris climate agreement goal of preventing global warming over 2 degrees and aiming to keep warming to below 1.5 degrees.

The IPCC recently released a special report summarising scientific consensus about the damage that 1.5 degrees of global warming is likely to do, including increased heat, reduced rainfall and increased extreme weather in Australia. To prevent this level of warming, the IPCC found that global use of coal must be phased out in OECD countries like Australia and South Korea by 2030. The draft conditions of approval for Bylong Mine allow for mining to continue until 2044. This is 14 years after the recommended date for Australian coal mining to cease.

Whatever KEPCO's claims about the likelihood that there will be demand for coal from this mine, NSW Government policy states that, "The NSW Government endorses the Paris Agreement and will take action that is consistent with the level of effort to achieve Australia's commitments to the Paris Agreement."

In justifying this mine project the proponent cites the IEA's "New Policies Scenario" which would drive global warming of 2.7 degrees, well above the Paris commitment and likely to cause out of control climate disruption.²

In conclusion Mudgee District Environment Group considers the following to be significant Issues of Concern and Threats to:

- Ongoing farming enterprises including the pioneering natural sequence farming techniques at Tarwyn Park, other water users, agricultural production and long term rehabilitation

Threats to:

- The Bylong River and connected groundwater

Threats to

- State significant heritage landscape values of Bylong Valley, The Wollemi National Park, the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and the Biodiversity of the area.
- Aboriginal cultural heritage, and community in the region

Threats of

- Increased Climate Change

Consequently we again ask that the Independent Planning Commission reject this project.

P. Setchell.

Phyllis Setchell - MDEG Chairperson

7.11.2018.

² Climate Institute "Why International Energy Agency scenarios should not be misinterpreted as forecasts" February 2017 http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/verve/resources/TCI_IEAScenarios_230217.pdf