

Members of the commission, ladies and gentleman.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today, I am fully aware of the number of speakers that is before the panel, so I will keep this as short as possible.

As introduced my name is Peter Shelley and for the last 17 years, along with my wife, own the Rylstone Newsagency and Licenced Post Office.

I have spent the last week writing down what I wish to convey to the commission about the seriousness of our position without exaggeration and with statements that can be verified as correct.

You will here from business groups, individuals and environmental groups so I feel I need to give a brief background and why I believe I speak on behalf of the majority of the community of Kandos and Rylstone.

In 2004 Rylstone Council and Mudgee were amalgamated and I was asked by members of my community to run for Council as we were concerned, we would not have representation on the new Council. Though we do not have a ward system for our Council with the support from Kandos and Rylstone I was elected and have been continually re-elected including this current term.

I am not here today speaking in any official capacity as a Councillor or speaking on behalf of Mid-Western Regional Council.

I am however speaking as a small business owner from Rylstone and as a community member who through his roles have gained insight into the socio economical status and condition of our towns and the benefits the KEPCO project will have, specifically in relation to the Kandos and Rylstone region.

In the last 10 years we have seen a dramatic loss in employment and business closures.

We lost the major employer in Kandos when the cement works closed in 2011 and then the Charbon colliery in 2014 with the contractor Big Rim going into liquidation.

In a combined population of approx. 1800, both Kandos and Rylstone have suffered, more so Kandos as the geographical nature of the town does not lend itself to passing tourism and traffic.

Except for the community owned bank Reliance, all other major banks have deserted us and have closed their branches in Rylstone and Kandos. Families have moved away for employment and there is no hope for employing the majority of our youth locally. We have lost teachers due to dwindling numbers in our High School in Kandos and also in our primary schools in Kandos and Rylstone.

We have lost a supermarket both in Rylstone and Kandos, hardware store, computer shop, cafes and takeaway business, NRMA insurance, rural supplies, Haberdashery and clothing and just recently another employer closed being Seibelco.

The only services that have increased are visits by Government agencies for welfare.

We are a proud community and love where we live, the only significant hope for us is in increased employment and services generated by business that come to our area.

The only business on the horizon to save our towns is the Kepco Project. The money they have already granted and donated to our community have keep events and services afloat and they have indeed become part of our community.

Just very recently we held the Rylstone Streetfeast, it's a major event in our region which brings thousands to our towns. It's a very successful day for our towns and I would recommend anyone to give it a go as it is definitely a must do event.

Some here today to speak against the project attended and with everyone else enjoyed the day.

The major sponsors for this event were Kepco, MWRC, Bowdens Silver project, Moolarbin coal, Peabody energy, Willpingong coal mine and the Kandos Community charity shop which is sponsored and supported by Kepco as well.

Just this one event allowed generous donations to the farming community with many other organisations beneficiaries of the event.

This is only one event in one town, there are hundreds more, without Kepco many of these events could not take place, there support for our region is generous and very welcomed.

Most business in Rylstone and Kandos are within any 8 week period to close their doors. They have exhausted their mortgages and credit availability and are hanging on by the skin of teeth to remain open.

We are not complaining by any stretch of the imagination, its just the situation that we and most business's find themselves in and we will deal with it.

The only industry even on the horizon to assist our towns is Kepco, we are not talking prosperity just yet, just a chance to gain back what we have already lost.

Environmentally this mine has some of the stringent conditions of consent I have ever seen and believe all issues have been addressed.

Kepco will provide opportunities that at present are not available to us and will keep our towns alive.

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Without the employment opportunities that this project will provide and the continuing support from Kepco I despair for the future of our towns.

MWRC was presented with a petition of 450 from our local region last month in support of the Kepco project and I would like to present to you today a further petition of 400 signatures to add that support.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today and for your consideration.