

## IPC Public Hearing

### 26 Feb 2019 - Moss Vale

Thank you for this opportunity to address the IPC.

My name is Tim Frost. I retired 10 years ago after 30 years in the Army and 20 years in business. I chose to buy a property in Sutton Forest as it is one of the most pleasant, peaceful, and beautiful areas of the Southern Highlands.

I have acreage on the Western side of [REDACTED] and I have spent ten years now improving my property. In good rainfall years I can grow fodder crops such as Lucerne, meadow hay and sorghum.

I also run beef cattle. I am concerned about native flora and fauna and I have invested heavily in planting new trees, nature corridors and shelter belts.

The incidence of native birds and animals on my property has doubled in the past ten years and I wish to not only maintain but also keep improving the native habitat.

This year a breeding pair of eagles has returned to Mount Gingenbullen and they are a delight.

Eagles are at the top of the avian food chain and to survive in the wild they need the full panoply of life to sustain that food chain. That food chain needs trees and trees need water.

It is not permitted to use bore water to water trees and trees have to survive without irrigation.

The only water trees have is rain water, surface water runoff, and water held in the soil. This water is sustained by underlying aquifers and water tables.

If you drop the water table too low then the trees roots cannot obtain the water necessary for life and they will die.

I am reliant for water on rainfall, surface water such as the Medway Rivulet and on underground water which I access from my licensed bore.

My bore extends downwards 160 metres into the aquifer below Sutton Forest and the water in this aquifer is retained in part by the underlying coal levels which the Korean Steel company POSCO seeks to exploit.

My bore water is drinkable. Various experts have debated the effect on the water table of mining coal from underneath the aquifer and that argument continues.

What is certain is that all the experts, including those employed by POSCO/Hume Coal agree that the extraction of coal will damage and will definitely lower the water table.

Hume Coal state in their own projections that the water table and bores will not recover for over 70 years.

Realising that they will inevitably damage bore levels. Hume Coal have said they will make good any bore water loss by trucking in water as needed or by deepening affected bores.

Make good is a very subjective and doubtful proposition but, in any event, the make good proposition does not apply and cannot be applied to a lowering of the water table over thousands of acres of farmland for decades.

This risk should not be accepted as the risk of wholesale tree die back is simply too great.

I am frankly horrified that the proposed mine has also decided it will not treat water by establishing a water treatment plant but instead, it proposes to first extract clean water, use this water to process and wash coal, and then pump the resultant dirty water and associated sludge back down the mine and into the water bearing strata.

How this can even be considered let alone allowed in the Sydney water catchment is difficult to comprehend.

Local landholders know that the Medway mine near Berrima has damaged the water table around that mine. A number of bores have dried up altogether as a result of that mine's operations.

The Medway mine is still not only draining water from the surrounding area but is also, even after it has been closed for years, still polluting the water catchment through uncontrolled drainage. Remediation is proving very difficult and extremely expensive.

I have seen no evidence that the proposed POSCO/Hume Coal mine at Sutton Forest will have a lesser effect than the Medway mine and yet the proposed Hume Coal mine is many times larger and will, proportionally, have a much greater effect.

As an affected landholder I do hear various assurances from Hume Coal that all will be well; that damage will be made good; that adaptive management will resolve most issues; and that there really is plenty of water to go around.

I cannot in all good conscience accept self-interested assurances from commercial operators whose first loyalty is to their employer in Korea and not to the local community or to the flora and fauna.

I have written to you separately in a paper entitled "Insufficient return to the public purse". I will not revisit that paper.

I do wish however to address the proposition that this proposed mine will be good for employment and good for public revenue. This mine has already damaged property values across the region and a simple review of the Valuer General's valuations shows an unusual downwards impact.

The Councils rateable base has, accordingly, also been degraded. That is a cost to the community with absolutely no benefit.

There has been no study of the loss of jobs in the community from the incompatibility of tourism with an operating coal mine.

I hold the view that the proposed mine will destroy more jobs in tourism and agribusiness in the Southern Highlands than it will ever create.

I know a number of landholders who are neighbours of mine and who have ceased improving and developing their properties, and hence employment.

This mine has created years of uncertainty and concern in the area and this proposed mine has been held over people's heads like a sword of Damocles for over 8 years now.

The proposed royalty offered by the mine when it is in full production will be 6m or so dollars a year. Considering the damage the looming prospect of this mine has already done to the area and the much greater damage it will do if approved, this amount is derisory.

It is my view that the employment opportunity is one sided as there has been no study of job losses caused by the mine. In my view the so called benefits of the mine are overblown and exaggerated.

Quite simply this coal mine represents a game that simply isn't worth the candle. The mine is too small it is in the wrong place and it is at the wrong time.

In closing I wish to return to the importance of water. Any lowering of the water table will inevitably have a major and destructive effect on the water available for trees and for the pasture lands which sustain this community.

Water is an increasingly scarce resource and how a commercial coal mining operation can be even considered within a water catchment area is quite beyond my comprehension when other much larger and far more suitable mining areas are available outside of water catchment areas.

This proposed mine has no public licence. The communities around the mine do not want and they not only do not want this mine they abhor this mine.

May I urge the IPC to endorse the recommendation of the DPE: that the Hume Project is contrary to the public interest and should not be approved.

One further service the IPC can also provide for the local community is to not only recommend that the mine be not approved but to also recommend to the Minister that the exploration lease be extinguished.

The local community needs certainty. The local community does not want to keep fighting this mine for ever. Hume have had more than a fair hearing and enough is enough.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address you.