

Tane Schmidt
"Inana"



Independent Planning Commission of NSW
Public Meeting Tuesday 2 April
Moolarben Mine Modifications

I am lodging this submission as a local person affected by the negative aspects of the coal industry in our region.

I and my wife and family have lived on the Goulburn River at O'Brien's Crossing for over 25 years. The Sandy Hollow Rail Line is nearby and follows the river around.

I am a carpenter/joiner by trade and have sourced most of my work doing house renovations in the immediate district around Wollar and Bylong, until the mines moved in and bought out most of my customers.

The ongoing piecemeal increase of coal mining in this area has had a major effect on remaining local residents. The social and economic impacts on us is not recognised or accounted for in the decision-making process. We are sick of being treated as second class citizens with the main focus being on mining jobs to the detriment of everyone else. There is no balance in the process.

Our property is between the Wilpinjong Mine and the yet to be approved Bylong Mine. The increase in road traffic and particularly, the increase in coal train movements caused by the mine expansion has affected us greatly. We feel that our safety on the road is constantly under threat.

We are regularly held up at rail crossings by more and more trains. There are no warning lights, bells or boom gates at the rail crossing that we have to use on Ringwood Rd. This is particularly dangerous on foggy mornings.

I do not support the proposed increase of train movements from Moolarben Mine. There are already too many trains on the rail line, mostly running at night and all weekend. This is to fit in with other train movements on the Hunter Main Line during week days. However, there can be random trains at any time.

The noise from these long, heavy trains at night is horrendous and causes loss of sleep. Before the mines moved in we lived in a very quiet rural area with no background noise at all. The noise from the coal trains carries long distances, particularly in winter.

Sleep disturbance is a known and well-studied health impact. The belief that people will eventually get used to train noise does not work at our place. This is because there is no regularity in train movements. Sometimes they can be about 20 minutes apart for days. Then there will be welcome silence for days before they start up again.

Because of the current load on the rail line, it has to be repaired more regularly. We get the rail grinding machines in the middle of the night with the argument from the ARTC that this is the most convenient time for them to do the work.

Again, the impacts of this sleep disturbance on neighbours to the rail line is not considered.

The fact is, the Sandy Hollow Rail Line is already over capacity with coal trains. The ARTC are not the right people to be asking about this issue. Their funding comes from selling space on the line and they will most likely continue to agree to do this.

I agree with others that the Commission needs to do an independent review of the capacity of the rail line, including the recent spate of derailments that show a poor safety record.

On another front, the Goulburn River has deteriorated significantly over the period of time we have lived on its banks. This has coincided with the approval of major coal mine development on the headwaters. No-one has seriously looked at how much water is being taken from the river.

Ulan and Wilpinjong mines currently dump water into the river when it suits them. This needs to change so that water is returned when the river needs the flow to suit the weather conditions.

I don't agree with the argument that O'Briens Crossing won't be affected by mine water discharge during flood flows. There have been times when the major source of flows have come from rainfall at Ulan and not in other parts of the catchment.

In the 2010 flood event all three mines were given approval to release water outside the rules on their licences. This caused the flood flow across O'Briens Crossing to be extended for a longer period of time.

Moolarben already has approval to release up to 10 megalites a day. They have not used this to date. There should be no additional water releases approved from this mine.

Finally, I am very worried about climate change. It is highly irresponsible for any decision-maker to be approving an increase in coal extraction when global scientists are warning us of the dire consequences.

Yancoal already has approval to sell up to 18 million tonnes of thermal coal every year until 2038. I find this to be completely outrageous. I have a new grandson, only 9 months old. I grieve for the future he is facing with wilder damaging storms, longer heatwaves and more severe droughts, bigger fires for longer periods, raging floods.

How can anyone seriously be prepared to inflict this life on our children?

The Moolarben modifications must be rejected. The mine is already too big, with too many adverse impacts that will not be fixed. There are no additional jobs, more impacts on the river and neighbouring communities and greater economic costs through increased greenhouse gas emissions.

There is no justification for this increase in coal production. Fourteen modifications of the Moolarben Mine over a 12 year period shows how poor the planning process is in NSW.

I thought the purpose of the Independent Planning Commission was to improve this process.

I trust that Commissioners will take notice of my objections and take a serious look at the implications of the proposal before you, especially the issues about the trains, the Goulburn River and climate change.

Thank you.