

Bathurst Community Climate Action Network Submission to Planning Assessment Commission on Bylong Coal Project

Bathurst Community Climate Action Network, as a volunteer based community group working since 2007 in this region for improved climate change policies and to lower our contribution to atmospheric pollution, opposes the proposed Bylong Coal Project based on the immediate impacts on the community and long-term costs of global warming on all communities from the continuation of the mining of coal. BCCAN heeds the warning of leading scientists and economists including the former chair of the Australian Coal Association, Ian Dunlop in calling for NO new coal mines. New mines and the extension of the burning of coal for electricity is counter to urgent global efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions to contain global temperature increases to two degrees and places global populations at greater risk of disastrous climate change.

The extraction of 6.5 million tonnes of thermal coal per year from the Bylong Coal Project will produce an additional 17.7 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emitted to the earth's atmosphere for every year. This amounts to an additional 407 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over the 23 years of operations under this mine application. This expansion of coal mining in our region will make a significant contribution to Australia's already dangerous levels of greenhouse gas emissions and exacerbate the impacts of climate change. Opening this mine is at odds with Australia's commitments under the Paris Accord.

BCCAN believes the scientific evidence is sufficient for planning decisions in NSW to rule out new coalmining approvals. We cite two authorities for this view. First, the Climate Change Authority has reported that to have a 67% chance of keeping under 2°C warming, the world's carbon budget 2000-2050 is 1700 GtCO_{2e}. (Based on this, the CCA puts Australia's share of this carbon budget for 2013-2050 at 10.1GtCO_{2e}. If all of Australia's coal resources were burned, the carbon released would consume two-thirds of the global carbon budget. It is likely that over 90% of Australian coal reserves are unburnable under even the most generous carbon budget. Australia has 77Gt known coal reserves, enough to produce 150GtCO_{2e}, 15 times our budget to 2050. Further,

We oppose further expansion of the coal industry as analysis released by the international climate research consortium Climate Action Tracker (CAT) which shows that Australia cannot meet its unambitious 2030 reduction target through its Direct Action policies. Even more alarmingly it shows Australia will in fact increase its emissions by as much as 27% under its current policies and continued heavy reliance on a fossil fuel based economy. The international community have committed to meaningful reductions in greenhouse gas emissions at the climate talks in Paris in 2015 and it is clear we no longer have the luxury of pleading for our exclusive short term profits and jobs over the impacts of climate change upon future generations and other nations. With member states of the Pacific Island Forum calling on Australia to limit its coal sector because of its contribution to climate change and sea level rise it is time for our country to limit our emissions at the coalface. The time has come for planning authorities to say to mining companies: this coal mine cannot go ahead because of its contribution to climate change because of its threat to this generation and to all future generations.

We note the observations by the Climate Council that Investment in renewable energy has increased six fold since 2004 and businesses around the world are investing more in renewables than coal, oil, and gas combined. In many parts of

Australia solar and wind energy have reached 'grid parity' and are more cost effective than fossil fuels. If mines which have reached the extent of their approvals are granted continual extensions Australia will be trapped in the energy economy of the twentieth century and transition will be made even harder.

On top of the threat posed by the continuation of the coal industry in Australia this particular new mine poses an unacceptable risk to the environment and residents of the Bylong Valley and surrounding region. The cumulative social impact of loss of population through mining projects in this region have not been considered. The enormity of the impact of this mine and insensitivity can be seen by the proposal to eradicate even the gravesites of local ancestors.

The anticipated impacts on agricultural land, horse-breeding country, heritage and water are some of the worst ever seen for a coal mine proposal in this state and will cause enormous, irreparable damage. It would destroy several hundred hectares of strategic agricultural land and several hundred more of land that was supposed to be protected as part of the Upper Hunter equine critical industry cluster.

The applicant proposes two open cut pits on the floodplain alongside a productive alluvial aquifer which currently supports cropping, beef studs and millions of dollars worth of agricultural production. The mine will dramatically draw down this aquifer and risks permanently depleting it because the predicted water loss is greater than the recharge rate. The ongoing impacts on groundwater and surface water systems will be greater than predicted and is a completely unacceptable legacy. The area has significant landscape, Aboriginal and cultural heritage values that have not been assessed in a regional context. The underground mine will also undercut sandstone plateau leading to extensive ground cracking and cliff collapse as experienced under Newnes Plateau from long wall mining. The Bylong Valley links two National Parks with World Heritage Listing and provides important habitat to endangered species including the Regent Honey Eater – this invaluable habitat will be further compromised if the Bylong Coal Projects is approved.

The Bylong Coal Project will open-cut historic Tarwyn Park, which has been, for forty years, a living laboratory for Natural Sequence Farming method of regenerative agriculture and drought proofing these landscapes in the face of climate change. The State Heritage Council is currently considering listing the world-famous Tarwyn Park property on NSW's State Heritage Register.

From an economic perspective the predicted job numbers are overstated compared with the current workforce extracting the same volume of coal. The predicted short term economic benefit of coal mining ignores the enormous long term burden of resultant climate change impacts. They also do not reflect the reality of collapsing offshore coal markets. The proposal to extract low quality coal while causing irreversible environmental and social damage cannot be justified. The cumulative impact on greenhouse gas emissions, the health and viability of communities in the region, biodiversity, Aboriginal cultural heritage, water sources and rural industry have not been adequately assessed. BCCAN opposes the Bylong Coal Project and encourages the Planning Assessment Commission to reject this application accordingly.