

KEY POINTS OF OBJECTION:

1. Social impacts

The social impacts of the project on the community of Wollar far exceed any other social benefits the mine may bring. These impacts have not been properly assessed by the proponent, the Department, nor the previous PAC, and they must be properly assessed before any determination is made. The proposed Social Impact Management Plan does not mitigate current impacts from the mine, notwithstanding future impacts if the expansion is approved. At the very least, if the project were approved, all remaining residents of the Wollar district must be offered acquisition rights.

2. Further planning needed

The Review of this project by the previous Planning Assessment Commission identified “the need for a long term strategic plan” for the coal mines around Mudgee, and for NSW generally. This is urgent need, as the current assessment approach fails to properly account for the cumulative regional impacts of multiple mining operations. The current PAC should delay its determination of the Wilpinjong Extension Project until the “long term strategic plan” recommended by the previous PAC has been completed.

3. Aboriginal heritage

The costs to Aboriginal cultural heritage of this mining project far outweigh any perceived benefits it would bring. The Rocky Hill complex contains an ochre quarry, rock art sites, and significant artefacts, but will be entirely destroyed by the proposed Wilpinjong mine expansion. The PAC Review recommended that further consultations with Aboriginal stakeholders should be conducted, and this (at the very least) needs to be undertaken before the project is determined.

4. Biodiversity impacts

The proposed biodiversity offsets don't meet current NSW policy, which requires that when critically endangered habitat is destroyed, it's offset must be “like for like”. That is, the same area of the same remnant ecosystem must be protected somewhere else. The proponent has not attempted to do this. So-called “supplementary measures” (such as paying into a fund) must only be a last resort, according to the policy.

More than half the offset credits for the Wilpinjong Extension will be on land that has been mined and rehabilitated. This makes a mockery of biodiversity offsets, which were already of dubious value in protecting biodiversity and preventing loss of species. Using previously mined land for biodiversity offsets must not be allowed.

5. Final voids

I support the recommendation of the Department that there should be no final void left in the proposed new pit. Additionally, should the project be approval be granted, it should require the proponent to backfill the voids in the currently approved pits, in line with community expectations and world's best practise mining rehabilitation.

7. Climate change

Climate Change impacts from the production of 13 million tonnes per year until 2033 are too great and have not been adequately considered. The world is now beginning to transition away from coal in order to meet pollution reductions needed to ameliorate climate change. There is no need for this coal mine to be given a six year life extension.