

Submission - United Wambo Open Cut Coal Mine Project – RO42/17

I strongly object to the United Wambo Open Cut Coal Mine Project.

I am a resident of Bulga, a small town near the proposed United Wambo Open Cut Coal Project.

1. Poor PAC Process

Short-term politics is infecting PAC decision-making and the public needs to be given a greater say on development and scrutiny of plans at the beginning of the planning stage instead of at the end of the approval stage when their views and input is easily disregarded.

Having two public PAC events in Singleton in the one week (Hunter Valley Operations South Modification 5 – D497/17 on 6th Feb 2018 and United Wambo Open Cut Coal Mine Project – RO42/17 on 9th Feb 2018) shows complete disrespect for voluntary community resources and capacity to attend.

In each of these hearings there would have been more PAC Commissioners and their staff/assistants in the Singleton Civic Centre than those for against the proposals.

Community members believe PAC Meetings are simply a rubber stamp for the mining companies and this is the reason they no longer want to participate in PAC meetings. PAC Commissioners would have also noted there wasn't any show of force by mine workers in their high visibility shirts either who were prepared to speak on the benefits of mining to the local community.

Speaking at PAC Meetings is irrelevant to the decisions made by PAC Commissioners. Speakers both for or against approvals, now assume it's a 'fait accompli' that approvals will be given regardless, so why bother.

People are sick and tired of doing so much work on their presentations and nothing ever changes. PAC just approves the mine's plans no matter what we or **the experts** say.

This lack of consideration exposes the Public PAC process for the cursory farce that it is.

Questions must be asked as to the cost involved in holding these meetings and what is achieved.

PAC Commissioners have no idea of the real impacts of these mines and they don't want to know. As with many of the PAC Meetings I have attended, **Commissioners approve mines like Wambo United with strict conditions but those conditions will never be met or policed correctly.**

PAC Commissioners must accept responsibility for approving the United Wambo Project and the further destruction it will cause through negative impacts to people, the environment and to our precious resource, water.

Just remember the approvals you permit now create damage that can never 'be fixed' in the future.

2. Social & Health Impacts

The people who are impacted the most gain nothing and are suffering loss of health and well-being, amenity, quality of life and financial instability.

The United Wambo Project will result in increased heights and volumes of overburden in an already 'overburdened' area. This will worsen the already hazardous levels of dust and air pollution that nearby residents are forced to endure.

The Jerry's Plains air quality monitor has registered 5 exceedances so far in 2018 and that is **only** with existing operations. The nearby Warkworth monitor has registered 8 exceedances of national air quality standards since the beginning of the year. This record number of air quality alerts in Jerrys Plains was registered **before** another open cut coal mine such as the Wambo United Project is added to the existing number of mines.

The EPA Dust Stop Program and environmental pollution licences are not managing air pollution from existing mines in the area so they certainly are not going to cope if more open cut coal mines such as Wambo United gain approval. It would be madness to add another 'super pit' into the already highly polluted area.

Residents' complaints are continually dismissed. Despite complaints and investigations, residents are repeatedly told the mine is operating within its licence or that the dust clouds are not from their mine. A response that is well-rehearsed.

In a recent example, Bulga residents reported a mine blast plume which passed over the village on Friday morning (Feb 9th 2018) causing dust and a nasty sulphur odour.

The NSW Environment Protection Authority confirmed they received complaints regarding blasts and its impacts and they would be investigating those reports.

With the first mine contacted, the representative stated the first blast was a small production shot and with the wind blowing in a SE direction, it blew over the mine. The second shot was a larger one in their West Pit that would have been visible externally, however, they state, also dissipated over the mine operations.

Clouds of dust were clearly seen by residents and the dust **did not** dissipate over the mine site.

The Mine reps said that given the wind conditions, blast monitoring and timings, they didn't believe the concerns raised by locals related to specifically to their mine blasts. **We know it did.**

Earlier that same morning, Peabody's Wambo Coal was also contacted regarding blasting and excessive dust. Their spokesperson said a blast had taken place at their mine but the dust did not leave the site.

Locals reported that clouds of dust **did** leave that mine site as well.

According to the Upper Hunter Air Quality Network Warkworth near Peabody's Wambo mine, they recorded PM10 levels exceeding the national standards reaching a spike of 129.7 which is rated as hazardous.

As our weather becomes hotter and drier due to climate change these air quality alerts will definitely increase. We don't need to add another open cut coal mine like Wambo United to this already hazardous situation.

Consistently, the concerns raised by residents and experts regarding noise and dust are dismissed.

The increased mine noise, if this approval is given, will impact on at least 31 additional properties in the area. It is obvious that the cumulative social impacts of loss of privately owned land and farming operations has not been assessed at all.

In PAC Meetings there is always references to the benefits of mining to the community but the people who are impacted the most, and this number is increasing at an alarming rate, gain nothing and suffer incredible losses.

Life near a mine is extremely difficult particularly as operations move closer. All is good for people who live up to 100kms away from the mine site but nearby residents are forced to live in a dangerous, toxic, industrial environment 24/7.

Nearby residents have front row seats to industrial operations day and night and are suffering loss of health and sleep, amenity and quality of life.

It has been insinuated that people who object to the mine are merely looking for funding to move. Residents who are exposed unwillingly to industrial operations day and night and are suffering loss of health, sleep, amenity and quality of life deserve to be funded to move.

As it is, residents who want to leave are unable to because their properties are unsaleable given the mine's negative impacts. This alone is reason enough not to give consent for yet another mine.

All is good for the decision makers, the PAC Commissioners, and people/workers who live up to 100kms away from the mine site or those who willingly choose to rent mine-owned houses in this polluted environment. But nearby residents have no such luxury and are forced to live in a dangerous, toxic, industrial environment 24/7.

Again, the people who are impacted the most gain nothing and are suffering loss of health and well-being, quality of life and financial instability.

3. Water impacts

To approve yet another mine modification will pose even greater threat to our already dwindling water resources and threaten its source.

Water is our most precious resource. Our weather is hotter and drier than before due to climate change and the approval of United Wambo in an already over-mined area will place further hazardous threats to the availability of water. Mining uses up and wastes so much precious water. And particularly in times of drought, this waste of precious water is criminal.

Remnant stands of threatened Hunter River Red Gums continue to lose sources of groundwater essential for drought resistance

Commissioners have no idea what happens to the land and water once they approve these mining projects and they don't want to know. They will approve this mine with strict conditions but those conditions will never be met or policed correctly.

The drawdown of base flows and alluvial groundwater associated with Wollombi Brook and the Hunter River will be increased. **The cumulative loss of groundwater across the Hunter Region has not been included in the assessments.**

4. Biodiversity impacts

Impacts on biodiversity will be extreme and not able to be offset.

United Wambo will remove over 250 ha of critically endangered and irreplaceable bushland that provides habitat for many threatened species.

Three nationally endangered species already suffering cumulative loss of habitat due to Hunter mining expansion: Regent Honeyeater, Swift Parrot and Spotted-tailed Quoll. The cumulative loss of foraging and breeding sites has not been assessed.

The biodiversity offset package for United Wambo has not been completed and will not replace essential habitat features.

5. Final Voids

I am very concerned about the final void at Wambo United. How can you place a value on land post-mining when you do not know what to do with the final void? How can you plan to monitor the void in the future when no one knows how it will impact the environment or how it will impact ground water supplies.

Commissioners, there is no use in saying the mining companies will take measures to ensure the safety and well-being of the people and the environment. Environmental disasters occur, dangerous breaches of consent regarding pollution occur.

Errors in the planning and assessing of mine projects has occurred too often with devastating ramifications. Irreversible damage has and will be done regardless of PAC consent conditions or preventative measures put in place by mining companies.

The 30 voids in the Hunter have created a barren, lunar landscape. Mining and the negative impacts of open cut coal mining on the local climate is already significant. The cumulative impact of yet another massive final void amongst the existing super pits and pending open cut coal mines has not been adequately assessed, including long term costs of management plus financial and environmental responsibility/liability. How can we be assured of any meaningful rehabilitation when there is not a Government policy regarding Final Voids? For this reason alone, consent for approval of United Wambo should not even be considered. Wambo have enough mess to clean up as it is...if ever that was even their intention.

If Wambo United can't afford to fill-in the void then they can't afford to mine in the first place. This should be given top priority before consent is even considered.

I strongly object to the approval of the United Wambo Open Cut Coal Mine Project.