

Dr Rob Herbert

Annandale NSW 2038

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NSW Government Independent Planning Commission
Level 3, 201 Elizabeth Street
Sydney NSW 2000

I am writing to object to the Bylong Coal Project.

This is the first time I have ever made a submission on a planning process. I am not an activist. I am a concerned citizen of NSW.

My concern is that the harms that would be done if this project were to go ahead would greatly exceed the potential benefit. The benefits will be transient. The harms will persist. Twenty years of economic benefit, only some of which is realised in NSW, does not justify the long-term damage this project will do to the Bylong Valley.

While there may be a short-term future in coal – enough for KEPCO to invest in this project – there is no long-term future for coal mining. The current scientific consensus is that the burning of fossil fuels is causing harmful global warming. Most countries will be reducing their reliance on fossil fuels for the foreseeable future. The market for coal must shrink. It would appear unlikely that coal mining in the Bylong Valley will continue to be economically and politically sustainable beyond the 20 year window used in planning projections. It is reasonable to expect that, in 20 years, KEPCO will leave the Bylong Valley.

Over the life of the project, the mine will bring benefits and harms. The primary benefits are the creation of jobs directly and indirectly associated with the mining projects and other economic flow-on effects of investment in mining. These benefits will only accrue if the economic forecasts of KEPCO are accurate; they will not accrue once the global market for coal contracts and the mine is no longer viable.

The primary harms are local and environmental. The local harm accrues from visual disturbances to what is a particularly beautiful valley, and use and contamination of groundwater. The global harm will be produced by the burning of over 100 million tonnes of coal over the life of the project.

When the mine closes, as it one day must, the benefits of mining will cease but the local harms will persist. The Western side of the Great Dividing Range south of Bylong contains numerous mining sites that have been abandoned having created extensive and, for all practical purposes, irreparable environmental damage. The Baal Bone mine at Ben Bullen is just one of many such examples. Despite the undertakings made in KEPCO's application, it takes a great deal of optimism to believe that a South Korean mining company will do anything more than the least it can get away with, or that it will have an ongoing concern for the rehabilitation of the Bylong Valley after the project is no longer financially viable.

In the long-term, the Bylong Valley's economic value will lie in agriculture and, increasingly, tourism. These are sustainable industries. The long-term prospects for both are threatened by the short-term exploitation of coal.

I urge the Independent Planning Commission to consider the long-term interests of the people of NSW. That, of course, requires balancing the short-term benefits of NSW citizens who stand to gain economically from coal mining, and the short-, medium- and long-term interests of people who stand to gain economically from agriculture and tourism, and who stand to be harmed by mining. In my opinion the harm of this project outweighs its potential benefits.

Sincerely,

Dr Rob Herbert