BYLONG COAL PROJECT: WHY IT SHOULDN’T GO AHEAD

I live in Mudgee not too far from the Bylong valley. We are angry and cannot trust our government. Of course, NSW needs money to build and maintain schools and hospitals but at what costs to lives and the environment when there are better ways to make money. Benefits versus COSTS – which I list below – don’t stack up:

1.THE BEAUTY OF THE BYLONG VALLEY which was voted one of the top 10 scenic drives in Australia a Would you build a coal mine right next to the Opera House?

2.THE PRICE OF COAL. From all my readings the price of coal is no longer competitive compared to renewable energy. The coal of the Bylong Valley is of not such great quality which means economically the Kepco mine is not viable. Are we being TRICKED here and have to expect the Kepco mine to be sold on (after all we know that South Korea is shutting its coal-fired generators to control air pollution) or for extensions to be approved as this is a RECURRENT feature of our area. Hence our anger. We cannot trust the big mining corporations: they have betrayed us every step of the way.

3.THE JOBS. A lot of people believe that many jobs will be created. But Kepco has already destroyed many jobs in the valley (local shop, farmers, horse stud etc.) Why can’t people instead get jobs in the fast-developing sector of renewables? Plus, there is no certainty that Kepco will hire residents from Kandos and Rylstone?

4.THE SOCIAL COST. Bylong is a social tragedy for all the people who enjoyed their valley and were forced to sell to Kepco and keep their mouths shut. If Korea needs coal so badly, they can buy it from existing mines and stop ruining people’s lives. What about the cost to future generations if the Commission upholds the short-sighted decision of our government.

5.THE BIODIVERSITY. Kepco will bring devastation to the Bylong Valley and we know how hard it is to bring back ecosystems. We also know that the Regent Honeyeaters have completely disappeared from 9 coal mining areas nearby. The Bylong Valley is surrounded by a world heritage national park and is close to the 2nd oldest reserve in Australia with significant biodiversity. How opening a mine is not going to affect the habitat of so much wildlife and the beautiful woodlands?

6. THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT. Don’t we have enough coal mines in the area? Ulan, Moolarben and Wilpinjong have devastated the beautiful surrounding woodlands and the village of Wollar. Originally their operations were going to stay relatively small but our government kept approving EXTENSIONS AFTER EXTENSIONS. This is the BIG BETRAYAL. Can we cope with more destruction, more noises, more trains, more trucks, more cars, more vandalism, more pollution?

7. POLLUTION AND EMISSIONS. Coal is acknowledged as the BIGGEST POLLUTER of all fossil fuels. AUSTRALIA NOW RANKS AS THE 6TH BIGGEST POLLUTER IN THE WORLD WHEN TAKING ITS EXPORTS INTO ACCOUNT. Emissions will trigger more drought, more floods, more storms and more physical and mental heath issues. And since Australia has signed the PARIS AGREEMENT, the Kepco coal mine would be a MONUMENTAL SETBACK. Korea did sign the Paris Agreement too!

8. REPAIRING THE DAMAGE DONE TO THE ENVIRONMENT. If Kepco destroys the Bylong Valley, the area will never fully recover. The complexity of the soil – not some fake green cover – will take decades or more to return. There is no example yet of a mine that has been properly rehabilitated in Australia and foreign companies don’t give a stuff about what’s left behind.

9. THE LOSS OF FERTILE FARMING LAND. It beggars belief that our government would favour coal over a most productive valley when the need for fertile land is increasing with an ever growing population.

11. SANCTIONS. One has to think that one day governments could be sued for allowing coal mines that are threatening the existence of our planet to go ahead. Trade sanctions could also be applied.

12. CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE PLANET. We know that coal is an EXISTENTIAL THREAT to humanity, therefore the Commission should not let the Kepco coal mine go ahead. A few jobs, a few dollars in the great scheme of things pale into insignificance.

The INDEPENDENT COMMISSION can choose to be on the side of history. Therefore, I strongly request the Commission take up this MORAL CHALLENGE and do the right thing for humanity’s sake. SAVE BYLONG FROM A COAL MINE!

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