

As a local resident of the Wollar and Bylong region I strongly oppose the proposed Kepco Bylong Mine.

This potential development has a multitude of severe negative social, environmental and economic impacts that have either been ignored or insufficiently addressed throughout the preceding application stages.

I have witnessed first hand how coal mining has torn apart the small village of Wollar and now the neighboring Bylong. Increased traffic movements have heightened the risks to road users. Combining this with deteriorating roadways has presented a situation where risks for road users are significantly increased.

Mine workers have proven to drive in an unsafe manner and increase the risks to local road users and native fauna alike. While this claim is not backed by evidence, I urge you to drive the Wollar road at night to witness this first hand.

The Wollar road is not sufficient to carry such increases in vehicle movements and size, this is most evident throughout the Munghorn Gap which overall is very narrow with multiple blind corners. If the proposal is approved conditions must apply in regards to upgrading of the Wollar to Mudgee roadways, further, the potential for having mine staff to be shuttled to and from site would help to minimise the number of road users and would be in line with many other mine approval conditions across the state.

The increased rail line traffic has been insufficiently addressed and associated impacts on local residents are already significant. This includes ongoing, non-stop noise, having to wait very frequently to cross rail lines and the creation of fires next to rail lines due to sparks and breaking from the trains.

The development of the Wilpinjong mine saw the vast majority of Wollar residents be bought out and then leave the area. This has left the remaining residents with a serious lack of services, most notably the rural fire brigade. The region is highly susceptible to bushfire, heightened this upcoming summer due to the lack of rainfall and the ongoing drought throughout NSW. This means that it is more important than ever to have manned bushfire brigades. This is not the case in Wollar (the mine staff that are volunteers work shifts and are rarely available or willing to actually participate). The Bylong fire brigade is facing the same issues and therefore there are large unprotected areas that are placing those remaining in the region at extreme risk. Climate change exacerbates this issue further and approving new coal in NSW adds to the problem.

The impacts to the Bylong river and the connecting groundwater have been inadequately considered in the Department of Planning final assessment report. Also the impacts to the Goulburn river has been inadequately addressed, most notably the potential for increased salinity levels and for cumulative impacts due to stressors placed on both the surrounding aquifers and surface water bodies due to the three additional mines (Moolarben, Ulan and Wilpinjong) in the Goulburn river catchment area.

Growing up along the Goulburn river I have seen first hand the rapid decline of this waterway and a sharp reduction in the biodiversity of the area.

Of the 216 identified Aboriginal archaeological sites and 32 cultural features, at least 102 will be directly impacted and a further 146 will be subject to subsidence related impacts (Hansen

Bailey, 2015, pp.372). This shows that there is a significant impact to Aboriginal cultural heritage and Kepco demonstrate their belief that the importance of such sites is minimal.

Australia and New South Wales have made a commitment to adhering to the Paris Agreement which aims to keep global temperature rise below 2 degrees celsius below pre-industrial levels.

The IPCC recently released its Special Report 15 which details the need to limit this warming even further to at most 1.5 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Utilising this information has allowed me to come to the conclusion that allowing any new coal mines to be approved in NSW or Australia as a whole is irresponsible and is proof that some short term economic gains are prioritised over the future of Australians and world citizens alike. This belief is backed by a consensus in climate science projections and demonstrates the need to act now.

In making a determination over new coal proposals, the cumulative impact must be addressed far more sufficiently. The individual decision here may be seen as having a small impact on a global scale, however, cumulatively it can be counted as significant. It is telling the world that Australia is not interested in adhering to the Paris Agreement. It is telling the world that New South Wales is more interested in making a quick dollar over protecting the environment for current and future generations alike.

The justification for approval of the Bylong mine talks on how South Korea are dependent on fossil fuels for their energy needs. I fail to understand how this is a problem for Australians. Should we not be forcing their hand by denying them this filthy resource and instead suggest moving towards a renewable energy future that will both benefit ourselves and the global environment. It is time for the New South Wales and Australian government to stop continually announcing to the world how proactive our environmental policy is, without any real action being undertaken. This is where you can step in and have a real beneficial impact.

Again I emphasise the importance of the decision being made here. This beautiful region is already facing significant pressures from drought and mining. A new coal mine in the Bylong Valley only goes to benefit a very few people at the expense of the natural environment and the Australian public.

Australia is changing, we no longer need coal for energy, we no longer want new coal to be dug out of our fertile prime agricultural lands and we want our water and biodiversity to be protected.

Thank you,

Max Smiles-Schmidt