

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to voice my objection to the Dartbrook Coal Mine and specifically to Australian Pacific Coal's Dartbrook Mine DA 231-7-2000 MOD 7.

My objection is probably a little bit unusual as my Dad is writing it on my behalf. I'm 18 months old and I know this kind of thing is usually decided by adults, but as I'll be living with the impacts of this mine and others like it, Mum and Dad thought my voice should be heard.

I'm wondering when we look back on this decision, where will the voice of the people have been considered? How will history judge the decision makers that approve or disapprove of this mine? The will of the residents of the Upper Hunter is clear. The only place people have to truly voice their opinion is at the polling booth, because it is anonymous and free from the repercussions of public opinion. The Upper Hunter Shire has clearly stated that it has a 'no mining' policy. It follows then that the policy is endorsed by the residents.

State government is not so clear. The bulk of the electorate reside in mining dominated towns like Cessnock and Singleton. Population wise in our state electorate, the Upper Hunter is in the minority. Our only true voice is with our local council. The state government have abandoned us.

My mum and dad helped run a public meeting where almost everyone was against the Dartbrook proposal. Except for the mine owner and another man that worked in the mining industry. That's out of over 100 people that attended.

Where are the people that support this mine (and continued new mining in the Upper Hunter)?

Mum and dad are also some of the youngest people that can remember the Upper Hunter region before the mines took over. Not many young people would remember what it was like to drive into Muswellbrook without being confronted with the absolute disgrace that is Bengalla and Mount Pleasant. Visually, Muswellbrook ranks alongside Broken Hill and Mount Isa – except the Upper Hunter is meant to be beautiful wine and horse country.

What of our air quality? Why have air quality standards when planning authorities blatantly approve developments that openly admit there will be breaches? We are supposed to be living in a rural area, not somewhere comparable to Beijing. Dartbrook can only add to this terrible record of air quality in the Upper Hunter.

We heard at the public meeting there was already 1.6m of subsidence from existing Dartbrook operations. 1.6m on perfect river flat. This is a disgrace.

What about the trucks that will be hauling the coal from the drift to the entrance to the tunnel? How many trucks will there be and where will they go at night? Back out onto our already overcrowded and run down highways?

Our Government is currently planning for a world where our energy won't be produced by coal, where driverless cars will be normal and where most of the jobs we currently have won't exist. This thinking is terrific and will create an exciting future for people like me, but it needs to be extended to the mining industry.

When I'm a little older, I'd like to attend my local primary school and high school. If Dartbrook is approved, Aberdeen schools will be looking directly into a coal pit. Unfortunately, these schools already receive dust from the Mount Arthur North and Bengalla open cut mines and, unless your Department does something about it, they will also be on the receiving end of the dust from the Mount Pleasant, Dartbrook, Muswellbrook West and Manobalai open cuts.

My family have lived in the Upper Hunter for more than six generations and looking a little further into the future, I might even like to stay here myself – it's the perfect distance from Sydney or Newcastle for the kind of flexible workplaces that my generation will have.

One of the things that will help me decide whether I have a future in this area though, is whether there is clean air and water and whether I still see the fertile farmland that is here now.

Please make sure you consider people like me, who are too small to have a say, when you make a decision on this proposal.

Kind regards
Adeline O'Connell