The requested expansion/extension of mining operations presents incredible risk and foolishness in light of our current prolonged drought. The likelihood of ongoing dry conditions and extensive usage of available water by this mine (without even considering the effects of changes in salinity levels, water table, and spill) by this mine means that farming industries reliant on irrigation in the region are likely to be significantly adversely affected. Towns within hours of this mine are running dry and buying in bottled drinking water and cartage for stock. Air quality data apparently met standards for this application – yet the health of communities exposed to these particles suggest that coal and mining dust during extraction and rail transport is not insignificant. The cumulative effect of yet more and more exposure to these substances is more telling than modeled data plots.

Our country has been crippled by drought, devastated by fire, hammered by hail, shrouded by desert dust and flooded in the last two weeks alone. Our world is in the midst of a climate crisis, and projections state we have only 11 years to be able to cap the global rise to 1.5 degrees and limit exponential, catastrophic climate change. The justification of extraction of further thermal coal under the pretenses listed in the application is outrageous and farcical. The assertion that “the demand for coal is driven by global coal-fuelled electricity generation, which is unlikely to change in the near future”, is in no way in keeping with the goals of the Paris Agreement, and at odds with actions of other countries. The UK affirms that climate change is humanity’s biggest threat. Germany as able to pass parliamentary measures to retrain coal industry workers within eight months of the proposal being brought forward, as it understands that the time to act is now. Australia is lagging due to money in government pockets from coal royalties, yet we as citizens are becoming climate refugees, moving off farms where bores are dry, choosing between buying nappies and bottled water in Moree, and being evacuated from beaches. How irresponsible of the applicant to shift the burden of emissions accountability to importing countries, when they have the power to invest in renewables and still profit without exposing humanity to such risk in the first place.

The recent Bylong-KEPCO decision referring to both groundwater risk and global warming flow-on impacts from the mine affirms that such trivial, throw-away lines as that coal demand is “unlikely to change” are not sufficient in light of our need for immediate action on climate change. Australia has such a wealth of renewable energy and great agricultural scope. Demand for coal IS likely to change if we provide the alternatives that are so readily available in Australia. We have a chance to get our politician’s heads and wallets out of the backsides of mining companies and realise that projects like this affect more than just the tiny bordered area on a map for an Environmental Impact Assessment of the 200 surveyed community members for a Social Impact Assessment.

While I understand you are working within planning regulations, a proposed mine expansion of this scope is ludicrous and must be rejected. The air quality, groundwater and environmental impact are too great for such a proposal to succeed. We look to the Bylong decision in hope, as you hold great power over the health of our local area, our communities, and the likelihood of catastrophic climate change. I hope that your decision does not see our children side by side on a beach, coughing through dense smoke and heat, in the hope of being evacuated from flames.