

Submission: A strong objection to the proposed Vickery Mine

Dear Sirs / Madams of the IPC,

I strongly object to the proposed Vickery Coal Mine

Firstly, for the record, may I state that this is a defining moment in Australian history.

Australia has this week officially become the world's largest exporter of fossil fuels - and therefore the largest exporter of climate change. I will refer to 'climate change' from now on as 'climate crisis' as it is a far more accurate description.

I understand that the Vickery mine alone would extract 168 million tonnes of coal, at a rate of up to 10 million tonnes per year. One third of it will be thermal coal and will be burned for electricity overseas. Altogether, should you allow this mine to go ahead, this mine will add 370 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere.

I ask, knowing beyond all doubt what we know about the prevailing climate emergency, how is this project justifiable?

There is no argument over the reality of the climate crisis we now face. Here in Australia we have just suffered an unprecedented summer of bushfires, record temperatures and record drought levels - and this is just the beginning. Let me stress this point, we are currently experiencing a minimum global average of 1.5 degrees of warming above pre-industrial levels but many credible scientists warn we could be headed for as much as 5 or 6 degrees of warming. Due to the unpredictable nature of positive feedback loops, our current climate modelling breaks down beyond a certain point - so in reality, this means impacts could in fact be exponentially worse than our best modelling suggests. However, due to carbon levels already in the system, it's now accepted that more catastrophic impacts are already in the post and that all we can hope to do now is scramble to minimise the damage.

We constantly hear about the value of these types of projects to our economy. Yet we rarely hear what the *actual real cost* is if their impacts are included in the financial costs of events such as drought, bushfires, floods and famines. I urge you to consider and weigh up these costs in your deliberations also as multiple future catastrophes, like the bushfires we have just experienced, may indeed bankrupt the country.

So whether the full gravity of this decision has landed or not, please realise that you and the IPC are assured a place in history. I sincerely hope that you are indeed independent and can look at the whole picture objectively. I ask that in your deliberations you are also planning for the future - because already, it does not look pretty, especially for a loving parent with young children, such as myself.

I am already processing grave fears about the future my children will now inherit, thanks to our inaction and recklessness.

However, we can still hope to minimise impacts if we act now. Covid19 has shown us what is possible if necessary urgency is applied. And there appears to be ample grounds to reject this Vickery mine proposal which makes your job much easier.

Some points to consider are as follows:

The mine appears to be 'sold' to the public by stealth. I note it is referred to as an "extension" but my understanding is that it is a new mine, sitting on a green field site in the middle of highly productive farming land near Boggabri. It will require a new rail connection that will cross the Namoi River and it all sits on a known floodplain.

'Jobs jobs jobs' appears to be the main justification we hear - and yet the jobs that are impacted by the project such as traditional farming and services industries are not taken into account. These invasive industries have a net loss effect in regards to jobs. And in Whitehaven's own publications it clearly states that it will "use autonomous truck fleets at Vickery early in the project's life to reduce operating costs" So clearly profit is the real motive, not supplying jobs.

The mine site includes the historic "Kurrumbede" property, said to be the inspiration to Dorothea MacKeller's iconic poem "My Country". Vibration from mine blasting will harm the homestead and the beautiful 'land of sweeping plains' and 'rugged mountain ranges' will be scarred forever. An important piece of our country's precious heritage is at stake here and of course, it should be protected and heritage listed rather than sold to a mining company for their business profits.

There is no social licence for this mine. Narrabri Council has formally objected to the project, due to its social impacts on the Boggabri district, already reeling from the depopulation of farms by Whitehaven's nearby Maules Creek coal mine. The fabric of the local community has been decimated by coal companies with over 90 farming families forced to sell up and move out. This is horrific and totally unacceptable.

You hear it over and over: water is our most precious commodity. This is a fact. To waste quality potable water resources washing huge amounts of unnecessary coal is simply abhorrent. The most challenging aspect of the mine is its lack of water. Even the Department of Planning admits it might run out of water in dry times. To feed its thirst for water, Whitehaven's nearby Maules Creek coal mine has already taken water illegally, outbid local farmers for water at auction and built pipelines from nearby farms to divert farming water for mining. Boggabri residents have complained about Whitehaven stealing water illegally for years. And now, only this week, our regulator is taking legal action against Whitehaven for stealing water for their Maules Creek mine. Why are they having to steal water? It points to the operation being unviable, even with the maximum legal water allowance.

So building yet another water hungry coal mine in the parched Namoi region is complete madness in anyone's books. The Namoi is the life blood of the region and a

vital public resource. It is already under tremendous stress thanks to drought and the climate crisis. There is an endangered koala population living in redgums along its on the mines boundary - what will become of those precious wildlife icons? Yet more collateral damage for the sake of unwanted coal and a private company's profits?

Whitehaven proposes to pile mine spoil on top of 202 hectares of the Namoi alluvial aquifer, a plan the Department of Planning Industry and Environment's own Water Division has stated it does not support because the presence of acid forming materials in the spoil will mean heavy metals could leach into the aquifer below. This is a massive risk to farmers and the wider environment.

Should you support Whitehaven's new coal project you are essentially condemning the planet and future generations to a miserable battle for survival. Alternatively, you could take a stand - for the sake of your kids and future generations and be on the right side of history by condemning this despicable project that has upset millions of Australians and will no doubt be seen as the most important frontline in the battle for a safe climate.

I am shocked and appalled that farmers are being outbid for precious water resources and can not compete with coal companies who wish to use this precious resource for washing coal. Is that a responsible use of our valuable water supplies?

Massive coal mines such as the proposed Vickery mine also bring increased particulate air pollution - which they will be careful NOT to monitor, even though they surely have a responsibility to the community they have disrupted to do all in their power to mitigate health risks. I understand there is still no effective monitoring at their Maules Creek operation.

There have been at least five reports of unexploded blasting gas - huge orange plumes of it - drifting over local homes and schools. This gas is incredibly toxic and can kill a young child if inhaled - and yet we are assured there is 'no risk to public health' through their mining operations. Mistakes will inevitably continue to happen in Whitehaven's operations.

I understand that the company has been guilty of more than 20 separate breeches in the last 12 years alone. Will the IPC also take responsibility for the breeches of these conditions should they endorse this project. Approving the project means that the IPC also endorses Whitehaven Coal as a good corporate citizen. So given their horrendous track record, do you feel that they can be trusted.

Most critically of all, as mentioned earlier, the world is on the brink of triggering runaway climate destabilisation. We have recklessly abandoned our responsibilities to the Paris climate change deal struck in 2015 which aims to hold global warming to below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This target seems highly ambitious, especially given the direction our Government wishes to take us. But perhaps we can aim for 2 or 3 °C? Is food production possible in 50+ degree temperatures? Regardless, it should be painfully obvious that building a

new thermal coal mine is the clearest example of what we need to avoid if we want a stable long-term climate.

I ask that you factor all this into your planning decisions - because big questions will already be asked of us in years to come - and these burning questions will be especially asked of the IPC who we entrusted our care to.

Yours sincerely,
Mr B Shoebridge
Father / Concerned Global Citizen