Submission against Russell Vale

I object to the proposal to reopen the Russell Vale Coal Mine. It is unbelievable that the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment ( DPIE) could be so incompetent as to accept the arguments of Wollongong Coal and fail to recognise the costs to the community & the State of NSW, and indeed the world.

Wollongong Coal’s Proposal to reopen the mine blatantly manipulates its estimate of greenhouse gas emissions. It divides the estimate of total emissions by the ratio of NSW population to global population to calculate the emissions attributable to NSW. This massively reduces the estimate of emissions attributable to the project.

Greenhouse emissions are of great concern because they are a major contributor to extreme weather events, such as the 2019 – 2020 bushfires, sea level rise exacerbated by increased storm surge, and drought affecting water supplies. These three examples have been experienced recently in the region where the Russell Vale mine is located.

One only has to look at the evidence presented by the World Meteorology Organisation, the Australian CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology to know that greenhouse emissions from coal mines such as Russell Vale have world-wide effects and that immediate action to reduce emissions needs to be taken, to be convinced that the reopening of Russell Vale Mine must not go ahead.

The document makes similarly manipulated statements about the effects of the reopening of the mine on the local community.

It states that the effect of the transport of coal from the mine to Port Kembla will be minimally different to when it was operating 5 years ago. This statement takes no account of the development of this area in those years: the substantial increase in population without a matching increase in road infrastructure, both in terms of quality and quantity. This will impact the local community in relation to travel safety and traffic congestion. The people of NSW will have to pay for maintenance of the road system and for the costs associated with the inevitable traffic accidents and injuries.

The green space on the escarpment provides recreation and exercise. The expansion of Russell Vale Mine will reduce the green space available close to the local community.

Particulate pollution and effects on the local population is understated by Wollongong Coal.

Particulate pollution has been an issue for residents in the past. This will be increased if the mine resumes operation and proceeds with the planned extension. The colliery is too close to residential areas. The number of coal stockpiles will be increased from one to three. The method of loading the coal trucks and the coal truck exhausts add to particulate pollution. It is the local community and the State of NSW that will bear the costs of respiratory and cardiovascular disease.

Both Wollongong Coal and the DPIE state that employment is the justification for reopening Russell Vale Mine. The State needs to move away from employment projects based on carbon-based industries. The harm this mine will do for the 5 years of operation is disproportionate. Looking at Wollongong Coal’s past record as an employer, shows the claims of employment dubious. Wollongong Coal has been losing money over the last 6 years. Wollongong Coal has a past record of poor safety for its employees and unstable employment. It has also not complied with various conditions imposed by the Department of Planning in the past. There is no certainty that conditions imposed now will be met and so jobs are not guaranteed.

In conclusion, the evidence is overwhelming. Wollongong Coal’s application to reopen the Russell Vale mine should be rejected.

Summary:

The quantity of Greenhouse Gas from the Russell Vale mine is vastly understated. Extreme weather events are telling us we must decrease emissions, not approve more. The reopening of Russell Vale Mine will be detrimental to the health, safety, amenity and lifestyle of the local community. The employment generated is proportionately small and of dubious security. The attachment expands on this.