

26.10.2020

Dear Commissioners,

I urge you to **reject** the proposed expansion of Russell Vale Colliery.

I am a Wollongong resident and have grown up within 10km of Russell Vale. I believe that the arguments in favour of this mine are being overstated and am worried that the proposed expansion will contribute to the degradation of the local and global environment within my lifetime and in the lifetime of generations still to come.

A common argument used to promote projects such as this one is something along the lines of “we need steel and steel needs metallurgical coal, so we need metallurgical coal mines”. I would like to briefly point out that steel does **not** need metallurgical coal. As of last year, around 26% of the world’s steel was produced without the use of coal¹. There are production methods that rely on carbon in the form of biomass, as well as relatively new, up-and-coming technologies such as hydrogen reduction and electrolysis to produce steel. These may be powered entirely by renewable electricity, and for this reason, steel produced in such a matter is often called “green steel”.

There have been many recent cases of green steel around the world, especially in Europe and the US. In Australia, there is also movement towards green steel, with Whyalla steelworks planning to be the world’s largest producer of carbon neutral steel by 2030². The Grattan Institute has also published work of the opinion that green steel has the potential to become a major industry in Australia³.

There is growing interest in the Illawarra community about potential green steel opportunities for the region. Some locals have organised a Green Steel Forum with expert speakers from around the country, which is happening on Thursday 29th October. I believe that you (commissioners) have been invited by email on two occasions. I also reminded you of this at the IPC hearing on Tuesday 20th October. I have been in contact with one of the organisers, who has yet to receive a reply from you.

If steel is going to be at all relevant to your decision on this expansion of Russell Vale Colliery, then I expect you to attend this online event and hear what the real experts have to say.

This project gives me two main reasons of concern.

The first is the huge risk that this proposal poses to the water security of Australia’s largest city – the five million people that live there today, as well as all the people that will ever live in the region. In

¹ *Gloucester Resources Limited v Minister for Planning [2019] NSWLEC 7*, Land and Environment Court NSW, point 547, accessed 26.10.2020 at:

<https://www.caselaw.nsw.gov.au/decision/5c59012ce4b02a5a800be47f>

² *GFG’s Greensteel transformation in Whyalla*, Sherrie Mazur, FENCiT, June 2020, p10, accessed 26.10.2020 at: <https://june2020.thefence.com.au/2/>

³ *Green steel is no longer a fantasy*, Tony Wood, 11.05.2020, accessed 25.10.2020 at: <https://grattan.edu.au/news/green-steel-is-no-longer-a-fantasy/>

addition, the quantity of water lost to this proposed mine is predicted to grow with time, and this mine is expected to start spilling out contaminants into my city around 2057⁴. I will be 59 years old at this point.

Wollongong Coal has offered to build and operate a treatment plant for ten years. Assuming that there is still a market for coal, that Wollongong Coal still exists, that Wollongong Coal follows through on this promise, and that they are actually capable of containing the contaminants, this takes us to 2067 – the year I turn 69. From then onwards, it is up to the public to mitigate the threats produced by this mine and to live with the damage. Approving this mine expansion would effectively be dumping the problems of increased water scarcity and pollution on my generation and the generations after me.

The other major objection I have to this proposal is its contribution to climate change. This proposal has huge scope 1, scope 2 and scope 3 emissions. It will drive climate change – there is no question of this. The increased likelihood of extreme weather events, food insecurity and ecosystem collapse are all problems that the world currently faces and which will become more significant in the coming decades. The operation of this mine would increase all these risks. To approve this proposal would be to abandon any responsibility to the welfare of current and future generations.

The short-term employment offered by this proposal are simply not worth the associated problems. Coal is not a long-term option for anyone. I am 22 years old, so I will likely outlive the coal industry. I hope to also outlive all fossil fuel industries, but I do not expect to see the worst of climate change, as this problem will continue growing well after human society starts operating in a carbon-neutral way.

A number of people at the IPC hearing spoke about intergenerational inequity. I think that this project is worse than inequity – it is intergenerational theft. If you approve this mine expansion, you will be knowingly compromising future generations' water supply and environmental security. You will be taking from future generations to serve current purposes.

Young people might not have a great deal of influence over current decisions, but when the coal industry is finished, when the world has moved past fossil fuels, when it starts to become apparent what was lost and what was saved, we will remember the people that got us there – the politicians, the corporates, the commissioners.

Please be on the right side of history. Please reject this proposed expansion of Russell Vale Colliery.

Regards,

Dylan Green,

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⁴ *Russell Vale Colliery – Underground Expansion Project*, Russell Vale East, Revised Mine Plan Groundwater Assessment, GeoTerra, p. 97 accessed 25.10.20 at <https://majorprojects.accelo.com/public/7f32dda24beaa9a6c18ea7d52be9c53d/RtPAC%20Second%20Review%20FINAL.pdf> (p. 390 of whole document)