

Submission into the 2020
Independent Review of the
Russell Vale Mine
Expansion

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Submitted by

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About Hornsby Shire Climate Action

Hornsby Shire Climate Action (HSCA) is an independent, community organisation based in Hornsby Shire, New South Wales. HSCA is dedicated to local action aimed at addressing anthropogenic climate change through strategies aimed at prevention and mitigation. Hornsby Shire Climate Action has approximately 200 members.

For further information on this submission, please contact: HSCA

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Executive Summary

Hornsby Shire Climate Action (HSCA) would like to register our opposition to the Russell Vale Expansion Project. It is the HSCA's contention that the Russell Vale Expansion Project should not be approved on the following grounds;

- i. The risk to water security
- ii. Ecosystem degradation
- iii. Uncompensated burden on public
- iv. Increased pollution locally and globally

- v. Threat to public health
- vi. The expansion is antithetical to the global need to address climate change
- vii. Unacceptably low short-term gains with unacceptably high long-term costs

It is the HSCA' s view that approval of the mine would represent a failure of the state and federal authorities to act in the best interests of the Australian peoples, as the mine poses an unacceptable risk to water security and biodiversity in a country prone to droughts that are increasing due to climate change. Furthermore, the arguments in favour of the mine extension are based on shortsighted economic interests, with no feasible plan in place to internalise the negative externalities that will extend well beyond the life of the mine.

While HSCA understand the need for energy security and a robust economy, it does not follow that this mine is the appropriate course to secure either of these exigencies. The Russell Vale mine will be supplying coal directly to their parent company in India, Jindal Steel and Power Ltd, rather than the open market and therefore are unlikely to secure the highest price leaving Australia with minimal royalties.

The mine expansion places a disproportionate burden on the Australian public as it threatens water security, biodiversity, and increases pollution and greenhouse gases (GHGs), and the economic return is insufficient to compensate for this.

1. Risks to water security

If approved, the Russell Vale Expansion Project would take place within areas of the Greater Sydney Water Catchment that are particularly sensitive as they have strategic importance. The mining method used, triple seam mining, is an especially risky method, an issue that has already been raised by a substance engineer who claims that the expansion project, which would occur underneath to previously mined coal seams, could create a negative cumulative effect. The lack of transparency surrounding this issue is worrying as the mine owners, who are based in India have no tangible incentive to prevent long-term damage in any real sense.

The risk to the Australian communities' water security far outweighs the potential economic benefit, and therefore, this project is not in the public' s best interests.

2. Degradation to Ecosystem

The mine expansion is expected to drain a significant amount of surface and groundwater from the Cataract Reservoir catchment which will have a negative impact on biodiversity in the area. Not only does this risk, Sydney' s water supply, but damage to the ecosystem will reduce the catchment' s carbon sequestration and storage capabilities. Currently, the area is off-limits to the general public because any damage to it threatens the purity of Sydney' s water supply and this should be extended to commercial ventures.

3. Social Impact

The local community has expressed significant opposition to the project and yet another coal mine in the region threatens social cohesion.

The risk to water security, as well as the expansion project' s contribution to pollution and greenhouse gases (GHGs) places an unacceptable burden on the Australian community.

4. Increased pollution locally and globally

Russell Vale mine has already received a warning for pollution leaking into the Bellambi Creek, and no amount of safeguarding can reduce the risk of further pollution and GHG emissions. Furthermore, the coal produced will contribute to global GHG production which will damage the international fight against climate change

5. Public health

Coal mines increase local pollution which will contribute to poor local air quality, which impacts public health. This is especially pertinent at a time when Sydney and the wider community are still reeling from the 2019/20 bushfires which blanketed the area in smoke and had negative health impacts.

6. The Global Fight against Climate Change

Approval of the mine extension is antithetical to be global fight against climate change. Mining itself is directly responsible for between 4 and 7% of global greenhouse gas emissions , which are the result of the mining process itself. Additionally, coal mining is indirectly responsible for 28% of emissions through the combustion of coal. This is increasingly becoming unacceptable to the majority of people, as the effects on the climate are too real, and too imminent to ignore.

The Russel Vale Expansion Project will be significantly detrimental to NSW emissions reduction goals, as it will pump an additional 304,600 t CO₂-e pa, of scope 1 and 2 emissions that will be counted towards New South Wales' emissions total, ensuring that the 2030 targets are not met.

Continued pursuance of economic gains through mining do not align with community standards.

7. Low Short Term Gains with Long-Term Costs

The Russell Vale expansion project will pay little, if any, tax, the coal produced will not be placed on the free-market, but instead will be sold to a parent company, thus reducing its price and royalties, and the jobs produced will be minimal and precarious at best. The potential benefits to Australia are so minimal, and can be realised through more

productive avenues, while the long-term costs to the environment – and potentially Sydney’ s water supply – are so significant that the project should not be approved.