# Objection to Russel Vale Coal Mine expansion proposal by Wollongong Coal Limited.

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Good afternoon. I and my family live in Bulli, within a few kilometres of Russel Vale. I have historically worked in Illawarra Coal mines implementing mine automation systems. Not unlike the earlier submission to the IPC by the Kembla Grange child care centre , I was a beneficiary of underground coal mining. During that period I avoided consideration of the damage to the environment I was contributing to and indeed promoting.

Cognitive dissonance is the avoidance of uncomfortable truths. It is also, from a mental health perspective a ticking time bomb.  It was cognitive dissonance, compounded by my ignorance that allowed me to promote under-catchment coal mining.

These days, I am privileged to be associated with my colleagues and friends in POWA and beyond who have made submissions at this commission. Professionally I am still involved in the Illawarra coal supply chain, though not in mining. So I am arguing against my self interest and my livelihood here.

This community has, in reality, collectively provided an unfunded due diligence service to NSW Planning and to Wollongong Coal Limited. This is a due diligence process that neither of these parties have done adequately themselves and one which has comprehensively demonstrated that this proposal should not go ahead. In my current professional capacity of evaluating large scale tenders and proposals I realise the value of these unfunded submissions. Where I work,  the due diligence team is part of the project team, not treated as unfunded outsiders.

This repeated and ridiculous David and Goliath approach to democracy itself needs scrutiny and overhaul. The risk avoidance and associated cost avoidance provided by this community is worth far more than the zero financial, legal and logistical support provided by either of the proponents. It is also costing the emotional and mental health of those volunteering to contest this proposal.

The submissions have included:

* Pollution impacts on local communities, including noise, air quality and traffic
* Increased fire risk and loss of biodiversity through drainage of upland swamps
* Unconscionable risk to the water catchment asset itself which generates billions of dollars of revenue each year and which is unrepairable in the face of structural damage
* Degradation of water quality and quantity
* Contribution to damaging climate change
* Poor employment conditions and outcomes
* Unfunded "eternal" management of the decommissioned mines and their perpetual damage and leakage.
* An economic case regarding revenue, cost and tax that does not hold water, so to speak.

Among many others.

In the face of these arguments, it is difficult to imagine how a well informed panel could support such a project, but I'd like to share a personal story to illustrate how such an outcome is possible. Considering the overwhelming historical trend to approve, rather than reject such proposals, it’s worth considering.

I grew up in a religious cult. I am embarrassed to say that it took me to the age of 53 to put aside the cognitive dissonance which allowed me to set aside its damaging falsehoods for so many years and look at the evidence without fear or favour. Coming out of that cult was traumatic, and took its toll on my marriage, but it has been transformative. My children and grandchildren have been beneficiaries, which was a big part of my willingness to go through it.

The Illawarra has a historic cult of coal mining, a cult whose use by date is well past. Like me, many people in the Illawarra have grown up with and accept this cult.  I understand those who are still held by its dazzling promises and convenient short term thinking, but, like the one I recently escaped, it is a dangerous and damaging cult and one we need to separate ourselves from, regardless of the short term discomfort this might entail. Our modern political culture is plagued and dominated by self interest and status quo. I am arguing against my professional self-interest, in the public interest. I urge you to be truly objective, think of the medium and long term consequences and refuse this proposal.

Finally, could the commissioners please explain how the issues raised by the community submissions will be referenced and argued in the report? Will there simply be an acknowledgement that such issues were raised, or is there a responsibility for the commission  to deal with the most significant arguments in an objective and transparent fashion? Many of these issues are devastating to the proposal and are due the respect of a considered and transparent response. Could you please advise us now on how these will be dealt with? Thankyou for your consideration.

Regards,

Craig Perritt