**RE: Wollongong Coal Ltd’s Russell Vale Revised Underground Expansion Project (Major Project 09-0013).**

I wish to object to the Wollongong Coal Ltd Russell Vale Underground Expansion Project.

There are multiple ways in which this mine extension will cause harm, global, international, national, state, greater Sydney and the local community.

To take them in order:

Coal is a fossil fuel and recognised to be one of the dirtiest and greatest sources of carbon emissions fuelling the climate emergency causing serious global climate change. This is becoming increasingly obvious as dangerous weather patterns increase the stresses on populations worldwide. Regardless of where these emissions occur they will have global and international effects as the atmosphere circles the earth. Digging up more coal when the climate is warming so rapidly is simply irresponsible bordering on criminal. Internationally Australia is widely regarded as a danger to the earth being one of the world’s greatest miners and exporters of fossil fuels. Nationally and locally Australia must have the courage to act to halt mining fossil fuels and transition to renewables in line with our commitments to the Paris Agreements.

Urgent reduction in carbon emissions is needed to keep our planet from warming above the 1.5 -2 degrees C in the Paris Agreement which Australia signed. Approving more coal mining must also be rejected for the sake of future generations. Coal, Oil and Gas are all fossil fuels and pose the greatest risk to our climate. If the Russell Vale coal project goes ahead, Scope 1 and 2 emissions will be added to the NSW Greenhouse gas inventory at a time when NSW Government policy requires a reduction of 35% by 2030 The Russell Vale project would effectively nullify about 12% of the intended reductions in all other areas of NSW industry and commerce.

If approved, Russell Vale would be in the top 100 largest emitters of Scope 1 emissions in Australia.  Russell Vale is a gassy mine and a lot of methane would be released into the atmosphere during mining – methane is 80+ times more polluting over a 10 yr period than CO2 - yet it would only add an extra 0.25% to our exports whilst adding a large amount of Greenhouse gasses to NSW inventory. The presence of large amounts of methane can makes this mine more dangerous to operate. Not a good option!

We are told that only emissions in Australia are to be considered by the IPC however this is ridiculous since carbon does stay within national boundaries. Whether Australian coal is burnt here or overseas makes no difference.

On the state level, NSW is completely irresponsible in the way it is pushing ahead with approval of fossil fuel projects in this time of accelerating climate stress. It is equivalent to exporting emissions and putting the planet at risk for our state’s and the miners greedy gains. It is time for DPIE to stop approving all new fossil fuel mining.

More locally, this coal mine poses serious risks to the greater Sydney area. It will be mining under the Sydney water catchment putting at risk water for over 5000 people.

Having grown up in the coal mining area of England I am acutely aware of the dangers of subsidence caused by underground coal mining. It was an everyday topic of conversation and concern. So many houses were affected, sometimes whole streets. Every house would have iron rods running through them with huge metal discs at either end to stop the walls from collapsing.

It was possible to rebuild the houses of my childhood but is impossible to rectify damage to the overlying rock formations above this proposed mine expansion. Mining under the water catchment raises concerns of a whole other order of magnitude. It is completely unacceptable and dangerous as this water catchment area is supposed to protect the water as a vital commodity for the population of the Sydney area, the largest city in NSW. Subsidence here will cause leakage and pollution of precious water and irrevocable damage to the essential water filtering swamp areas in the catchment. There has already been two previous layers of underground mining here, much of which has collapsed causing serious subsidence which is still worsening as further collapse occurs. The subsidence is now 1.78m. This is over five times greater than the 30cm originally predicted. The ongoing instability of these previous seams – recognised also by Wollongong Coal itself - calls into question current predictions for this new project despite approval by DPIE. During the recent drought dam levels fell alarmingly, this mine risks exacerbating the possibility of running out in future. However unlikely the experts consider it to be, the very serious possibility of this project causing subsidence and water loss fills me with horror. Australia is the driest of continents making water preservation our first priority. This factor alone is a reason for rejecting the Russell Mine expansion proposal.

Water is still at risk once the project is finished. The mining void will slowly fill up with water. According to predictions from Wollongong Coal and experts the water will keep rising until around 2057 and then overflow for as long as a hundred years or more. Wollongong Coal proposes to manage and treat this water for 10 years. The DPIE recommendation that Wollongong coal be required to make a management plan is ridiculous, as who knows what will happen to the company once mining is over and it is likely the NSW taxpayer will be left to foot the bill. Our greater Sydney water catchment area needs much more serious and responsible management by the Department to avoid further degradation.

Last summer’s horrendous bush fires in Australia, described as unprecedented, have been followed by similarly shocking fires in California, again far worse than ever seen previously. Water loss in the vital areas overlying the Russell Vale mine will cause drying and dying of native vegetation leading to accumulation of combustible materials which greatly increase the risk of future bush fires, Such environmental damage and loss of ecosystems reduce biodiversity and thus endanger our native wildlife risking loss of unique species.

Turning to the local level, this proposed coal mine is far too close to a densely populated residential community who have already suffered years of impacts.

The proposed onsite coal processing plant will cause multiple problems and concerns are heightened by the company’s failure to comply with conditions and the Department’s failure to enforce compliance.

A major health hazard is posed by particulate pollution affecting residents and schools who border three sides of the mine site. Proposed stockpiles generate large amounts of dust with their large surface area and the constant movements of truck loading equipment as they fill up the waiting trucks. Particulates are now well known and documented to cause serious respiratory and cardiovascular illness. Subjecting residents and especially children to this pollution is doubly punishing as the mined coal will be contributing to the climate emergency which the children will have to suffer as it escalates in future years.

Other issues of serious worry for residents

* noise from operations
* increased traffic problems from trucks passing their homes every two minutes
* traffic congestion on local main roads

Having listened to many powerful presentations over the two days of hearings I fully appreciate the need for local employment. However a new coal mine is not the answer especially given the history of previous problems with this mine. It is to the government’s shame that this has been ‘brushed under the carpet’ for so long instead of planning for a low carbon transition for coal mining communities. This is even more urgently needed now coal mining is no longer a viable career with rapidly falling coal prices as fossil fuels become stranded assets. There is a high risk that the socioeconomic benefits promised by Wollongong coal will not eventuate given the company’s inability to safely and profitable operate mines. They have lost money every year since 2013 and paid no tax to the Australian government since then.

I was disturbed that we were told repeatedly at the public hearings that the IPC is not allowed to consider the shocking previous history of the proponent Wollongong Coal. It seems unbelievable that an insolvent company, removed from the ASX with many claims against it and previous noncompliance with conditions, should be proposed by DPIE as suitable to conduct business. At the very least it should be required to put its house in order before the new proposal was even considered.

Therefore the proposed Russell Vale Underground Expansion Project is not in the public interest and I urge the IPC to reject this application from Wollongong Coal and recommend a speedy process to close the mine at Russell Vale permanently.

Thank you

Mrs Angela Burrows

27-10-2020