Dear Commissioners,

I am writing in objection to the Maxwell Underground Coal Mine Project.

I’ve been a staff member and resident of Godolphin Woodlands Stud for nearly 9 years and have worked for Godolphin for nearly 10 years. During this time I’ve had the opportunity to work at several of their sites in Australia and at Kildangan Stud in Ireland. You will have heard and read detailed objections in regards to the finer detail of this project from several other representative of Godolphin, I’m writing instead to give an overall view of what it is like to live and work at Godolphin Woodlands, the opportunity it provides and the history of the property and the negative impact this project would have.

Though I’ve enjoyed working at several Godolphin properties, Woodlands has always been where I come back to, and what was meant to be a short 6 month temporary transfer has turned into almost 9 years living and working at the property. This story is not unique with many of the staff I’ve worked with over the years either choosing to stay here, and even become permanent residents of Australia, or returned for multiple seasons to work. Almost everyone who visits or comes to work here comments on how unique and amazing the property is.

The thoroughbred industry is an international one, with Godolphin having thoroughbred breeding properties around the world including in England, Ireland, America and Japan to name a few. The industry is also a seasonal one, meaning some of the work can fluctuate during the year with the breeding season running from August to December. This is balanced by the Northern hemisphere breeding season running from January to July. This creates great opportunity for staff from Australia to often travel overseas for 5-6 month periods, and in turn creates opportunities for international staff to travel to Australia for work. these staff are often already employed within Godolphin in their home country. As such many of the staff at Woodlands have experienced the thoroughbred industry not only here but around the world and many have chosen to remain working here at Woodlands.

Many of the staff at Woodlands have spent their careers not only learning on the job but also completing a variety of certificates and university level courses with only a handful not having formal tertiary qualifications, and those that don’t come with decades of invaluable experience in the industry. Their expertise from both their years of hands on experience and knowledge is essential when breeding and raising thoroughbreds to the level which is required for racing at the elite level. Their education and knowledge is a major part of the reason why Woodlands has been so successful. The idea that just anyone could be hired to work with thoroughbreds is deceiving and couldn’t be further from the truth.

Over the last few years changes have occurred in the education of the next generation with many in the industry working to improve education pathways for those working or wanting to start working in the thoroughbred industry. The Hunter Valley plays a huge part in this, with the TAFE at Scone being a major base for several courses in the industry, alongside the Richmond TAFE in Sydney. This development of new pathways has focused on both theoretical knowledge paired with practical experience on working Thoroughbred properties. Godolphin has played a major part in this and provides opportunities throughout the industry for newcomers to train. Woodlands itself has hosted several long-term trainees and many short-term students over the time I have been here. This also includes many veterinary students for various Universities, mainly Sydney, spending short periods on the farm to gain experience of how a thoroughbred breeding operation works. These opportunities are priceless and would be impacted if this project goes ahead, loosing many an opportunity for students interested in becoming involved in the industry. I know that if these opportunities had been available 13 years ago, my own path to the industry could have been very different.

Currently over 25 staff, many with their families, live onsite at Woodlands. Along with this are many more which live in the local community. The property is a wonderful place to live, with a sense of community and peaceful atmosphere created by the people who live and work here. Even though the Maxwell project is an underground one, its affects will still be significant on the property and those living there. The increase in traffic, noise and air pollution would be unacceptable and could severely impact the quality of life for not only the people living here but the horses as well.

Having worked with thoroughbreds throughout their careers, from foals to racehorses, through to retirement, I can attest to the sensitivity of their senses, especially their hearing and how this can impact their behaviour, which can often become unpredictable. Working with horses always carries a risk, but to increase this risk is unacceptable. Horses health is also very sensitive to external impacts such as pollution and dust, with breathing problems severely impacting their ability to race to their best, as well as their life after racing.

Woodlands has been a part of the Thoroughbred industry for at least 140 years, with the Office of Environment and Heritage[[1]](#footnote-1) stating its significance as a thoroughbred breeding stud started as early as the late 19th century under the White family, who bred and raced many horses with great success. The main horse I have been able to find information on is ‘Paris’ born 1887 [[2]](#footnote-2) who was bred at Woodlands and owned by Mrs H.C. White. Paris not only won two Caulfield Cups, but also ran in the Melbourne Cup, and travel to England to win several races before returning to Australia. Prior to White family owning the property, the land was originally granted to James Arndell by Governor Macquarie in 1821, who lived on the property from 1829[[3]](#footnote-3), and with the local town of Jerry’s Plains thought to be established in the early 1820’s. It should be noted that this predates the first coal mine in the Muswellbrook region by at least 30 years[[4]](#footnote-4).

The stud has been connected to many champion stallions, broodmares and racehorses, with its most significant connection to racing shown through its history with the Golden Slipper. The Golden Slipper was the idea of George Ryder, who owned Woodlands stud from 1946[[5]](#footnote-5) to 1970. This connection is still apparent today with the 2018 Golden Slipper Winner Kiamichi being bred here and currently residing on the property to start her broodmare career, with both her parents being born here. Out of her 4 grandparents, 3 are buried on the property with honour. George Ryder’s impact on the Australian Racing industry cannot be ignored, as he was a founding board member on the Sydney Turf Club for over 37 years, and the Group 1 George Ryder Stakes on Golden Slipper day is named in recognition of him. This extensive history would be severely impacted, and possibly end if a mine were to go ahead so close to the property.

For all the reasons above I strongly oppose this project and any other project considered for the same location.

Kind Regards,

Heather O’Sullivan

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Veterinary Administration Assistant and Senior Stud Hand at Godolphin Woodlands

1. [Office of Environment and Heritage - Woodlands Stud](https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=2120023) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Obituary Henry Charles White](http://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/white-henry-charles-14584) (1837-1905) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [James Arndell](https://www.jenwilletts.com/james_arndell.htm) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Hunter Valley Coal Heritage](http://www.geomaps.com.au/scripts/huntervalleycoal.php) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [George Ryder Biography](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ryder-george-edward-14181) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)