**SUBMISSION BY LYNETTE CHAMAS TO THE INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COAL MINE BY POSCO/HUME COAL IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS OF NSW (INCL. THE BERRIMA RAIL EXTENTION).**

My husband and I moved to Bowral in 2013. I suffer from pulmonary fibrosis and one of the reasons we moved here was the clean air that we felt would help my health. We were horrified to learn that the Hume Coal proposed coal mine would see a pile of coal six-stories high and 800 metres long situated only ten kilometres west of our front door, and that coal fines from the stockpile would blow our way with the advent of westerly winds.

This presents **serious health concerns**, not only for us but for other residents in Bowral and Burradoo.

There are many retirement villas in both these areas, and more are being built as I write. Around the corner from me in Links Road two new developments are already being sold. At the Mittagong end of Bowral there is a block of new retirement units which are quickly being snapped up. On the corner of Links and Moss Vale Road, a third large development is currently underway. More and more retirees are choosing to get out of Sydney and come to the Southern Highlands and the sharp increase in developments and development applications reflects this.

 The people who are buying these units are older folk who bring with them the health problems of old age, in particular cardio-vascular conditions. Their health, like mine, would be seriously impaired by air pollution from a coal mine; their lungs, like mine, would not cope well with the fine coal dust that would be visited upon them every time the westerlies blew and deposited fine black powder on cars, house fronts, gardens, washing, people’s clothes, their hair and their lungs.

In addition Hume Coal proposes that for a period of 18 months the coal mining rejects, including toxic materials, will be stored above-ground and exposed to prevailing winds. A large part of the stockpile would end up miles away, in Berrima and Bowral and Burradoo, where it could do serious damage to the health of residents.

A dust storm that hit Canberra in 2018 left Bowral and Burradoo coated in fine red dust that took weeks to clear, finally only clearing after heavy rain. It affected everyday living in many ways. For example, when I washed my bed sheets and went to hang them on the line, the ends of the sheets that brushed against the grass were dirtied with red-brown stains and had to be take back to the laundry and re-washed. On windy days I could not leave the house because the wind was blowing the dust into the air and it affected my breathing. It coated the windows, which I could not go outside to clean. Hume Coal’s proposed mountain of coal would have the same effect and would impact on our everyday lives in a similar manner.

This is a serious issue that cannot be ignored. People’s lives could be put at risk. Extra pressure would be placed on local health facilities as retirees with respiratory issues began to suffer from poor air quality. Some could succumb years earlier than they otherwise would have, robbing them of extra time to enjoy their autumn years and their grandchildren

Although these health concerns are the top of my list, I have other grave fears and concerns regarding the establishment of the proposed mine, as noted below.

**The negative impact on the Southern Highlands tourist industry**

The Southern Highlands is renowned throughout the state of NSW as a much-loved tourist destination. Berrima is equally well-known for its beauty, its little cafes, its markets, its lovely heritage buildings. With a coal mine a mere 4.41 kms away it, like Bowral, will be at the mercy of the westerlies and the coal dust that will coat people’s cars and be deposited on the tables and chairs of the outdoor cafes. One wonders how long the tourists will keep coming under such circumstances.

Property values will drop, the demographic will change and the very things that prompt people to drive more than 100 kilometres each weekend to spend time (and money) in Bowral and Berrima will be lost. There will be gradual environmental degradation and the loss of social cohesion while property prices head south.

**The mine’s impacts on local employment will change the nature of the towns of Bowral and Berrima in a negative way.**

With such a large number of retirees living here, health care and social assistance provide by far the greatest number of jobs in the area, followed by the retail trade. These jobs rely on people wanting to come here, either to live or to visit. Clearly, a coal mine and the degradation of the environment would see tourist numbers drop and a reduction in the numbers of people wishing to move here, with a corresponding impact on both the retail trade and on the numbers of people requiring health care and assistance.

Accommodation and food services, which account for the sixth largest number of jobs, would be hard hit if Berrima became a mere coal town and Bowral and Burradoo lost their appeal to both tourists and incoming retirees. Unemployment would rise, creating social problems which currently do not exist.

**There would be grave risks to water security, plus the risk of pollution**

Hume Coal’s mine would require 13 billion litres of water a year and could affect the Medway Reservoir that supplies residents in Berrima, Bowral, Burradoo and Mittagong.

93 bores on 71 properties will be affected by the water table dropping between 150 to 200 metres, covering an area of 200 kms or more – Hume Coal itself admits the water impact will cover over 300 square kms. The impact will remain for up to 65 years after the mine closes and some bores may never recover, resulting in ruin for many of the farmers and agribusinesses in the area.

A foreign company cannot be considered more entitled to Australian water than Australian farmers and citizens.

**The beauty of the Southern Highlands and the safety of its wildlife will be negatively impacted.**

Increased traffic, heavy trucks and machinery clogging up the roads, the removal of trees, both dead and living, which provide habitat for wildlife including threatened species; coal dust and diesel emissions, increased noise, eight one-kilometre-long coal trains roaring through the little village of Robertson, shaking the homes of the people who live there as they break the peace and quiet of the night – all these things will degrade the lives of ordinary people who came here for peace and quiet and fresh air.

No-one would have moved here had they known a coal mine was being planned. No-one will come here if it goes ahead.

**Hume Coal’s mine would shackle the Southern Highlands to a dying industry, one which is opposed by the vast majority of Australians.**

Banks are refusing to lend to coal companies because they know there is little chance of getting their money back. The Southern Highlands would be ruined for a failing industry that, according to economists, would run at a loss and would give the NSW economy little return. An August 11, 2016 article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by Peter Hannam ran as its heading: *POSCO to lose money on Hume Coal, should snap up cheap assets instead* and went on to say that:

A new coal mine planned for the NSW Southern Highlands would lose money on every tonne produced and clock up a net cost to the owner of more than half a billion dollars, two new reports say.

(*http://www.smh.com.au/environment/posco-to-lose-money-on-hume-coal-should-snap-up-cheap-assets-instead-reports-20160810-gqp2on.html*)

I would recommend most strongly to the Independent Planning Commission that, in light of the objections listed above and, in particular the health concerns of the residents of Bowral, Burradoo and Berrima, that the community’s strong objection to new coal mines be listened to and acted upon, and that the application of POSCO/Hume Coal to establish a mine of any description in the NSW Southern Highlands **be denied**.