Social and Communal effects of

Wallarah 2

Central Coast of NSW (Wyong).

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**Introduction:**

It has become increasingly evident that today a new paradigm is being applied to development in Australia. Historically impacts of development were measurable by their probable effects on the various ecological processes, such as water, land use and the economic benefits that would flow from such development. However, the rise of the ‘social voice’ has demonstrated that economic measurability is a flawed process in that it fails to recognise the existent values of social capital and how such development might impact upon its raising.

This paper will demonstrate that insufficient attention has been paid to the impact that the proposed Wallarah 2 Underground Coal Mine will have on the heritage and social resources in the mine’s shadow. It has been noted that the Wallarah 2 mine is set to operate for a period of at least 28 years and, while there are claims that the impact of the mine on the area will be temporary, we are claiming that the impact on the archaeological sites, places of intangible significance and the wider aesthetics and ambience of the Central Coast will be permanent and irreversible.

Auxiliary effects of the mining, the increased use of a scarce rail resource, increased traffic, dust, noise, ventilation shafts and tailing dumps are all likely to have far-reaching effects on the broader social environment, including the degradation of the sense of place, a loss of social identity and the diminishement of the aesthetic values pertaining to the Central Coast. The consequences of this degradation will have a devastating impact on the attractiveness of the Central Coast as a place to live and as a tourism destination. Therefore, the negative consequences on existing and planned urban communities along with the denigration of the Central Coast’s eco-tourism and heritage sectors will, without doubt, change the fundamentals of the Central Coast for ever.

This paper will also show that as there has been so much talk and debate over the environmental and economic consequences of living in the shadow of mining in Australia these concerns have served to swamp important social justice issues. Such issues are not only manifold but relate directly to each and every individual that has to live in the shadow of mining. It is therefore sobering to reflect that the people who live in the shadow of the proposed Wallarah 2 mine, today, number more than 324,000 people. However, this is a number which is expected to increase within the life of the mine to a predicted 425,0001.

**The Central Coast today:**

An, “abundance of seaside, sporting, recreational, family, holiday and natural attractions, [which] makes the Central Coast one of Australia’s leading holiday destinations. It’s become a rapidly developing urban region on the coastline north of Sydney and south of Lake Macquarie and Newcastle”2.

This description serves to encapsulate the mosaic that makes the Central Coast such a unique and inviting place. We can argue that this generation has a legacy that has been created by and revered by the generations of folk whom have made the Central Coast their home or, as in so many cases, their second home.
It is notable that because of this internalisation there now exists an imperative that before any major developmental changes are made to the Central Coast it has become critical that the voice of the people who live on the Central Coast be heard since their voice has become a universal appreciation of what the Central Coast means to NSW.

Hence, it is this appreciation that we must now speak about as it lies at the very heart of the ambience the Central Coast has provided to generations of people.

The ambience of the Central Coast:

The importance of Ambience!

Because Ambience underpins the initial impression and because social justice demands good, lasting impressions, ambience not only acts to inform people it also provides the basis for emotional attachments. The impressions that people gain about the Central Coast thus become crucial beliefs about their emotional and social understanding of what the 'Central Coast' means to them as individuals. The difficulty that communities have with ambience is that as a shared social construct it is difficult, if not impossible, to create or recreate due, in part, to the multiplicity and diversity of its functions. Given that the ambience of the Central Coast is the product of its social environment, social history and social expectation it is, unquestionably, the most potent influencer on the narrative that is the Central Coast.

So we are speaking here of the aesthetics of the Central Coast. Although it has become best known for its beaches and natural attractions, the Central Coast today encompasses a network of sites with evidence of occupation by humans spanning more than 40,000 years. There is evidence abounding on the Central Coast that marks the interaction between numerous kinds of peoples with the area being also rich in biological diversity. However, we would argue that this evidence also marks the fragility that human exploitation brings with it. It is this fragility and the tensions that it raises that Australia from its earliest years, as a nation, still struggle with as governments and industry try to balance the many demands of 'Economic' as against 'Community' Development.

It becomes clear therefore, that this noisy debate over Wealth Creation and the resulting costs to the physical and social environments, which has so galvanised and divided our nation since 1788, continues still. It is also notable that it was this debate that led to a defining attempt at writing the original inhabitants and owners of this country from the pages of history. It is now unfortunately evident, that the mining industry and now consecutive NSW Governments have failed to draw salutary lessons from this history. This paper alleges that the NSW Government and Wyong Coal Pty Ltd, by their continuing activities, are demonstrating that Wallarah 2 is little more than an ill advised attempt to impose an 18th Century ideology onto a number of 21st Century urban communities.
The Social Capital of the Central Coast:

"This project is set to provide extensive economic and social benefits to Wyong, the wider Central Coast Region and NSW communities through job creation and business opportunities." (http://www.wallarah.com.au)

While Wallarah 2 has made many, apparently, philanthropic gestures and promises to the Central Coast the focus has, of course, been mainly on the Wyong Shire. The latest piece of philanthropy, a Draft Voluntary Planning Agreement (VPA) between Wyong Council and Wyong Coal Pty Ltd, has (as reported in the Express Advocate March 21, 2014 p.7) promised almost $20million in public benefits, if the NSW Government approves Wallarah 2!

This paper will now argue that it is such ‘philanthropy’ that demonstrates how little knowledge or awareness Wyong Coal Pty Ltd has about the importance of the raising of Social Capital on the Central Coast as a region rather than in Wyong Shire as a stand alone community.

As we have already seen, the Central Coast has created a depth of social capital that is based mainly within the aesthetics provided by its rich and diverse heritage. That these assets are both physical and socially derived can be said to be demonstrated by the burgeoning demand in the region for homes and land and the infrastructure that would support such expansion. But it is this expected expansion that is creating a crisis within the social capital as rising rates, transportation costs, teenage unemployment and concerns over health and education take their toll. A clear expression of the need for more social capital has recently been expressed by the joining of the Wyong and Gosford communities through the Express Advocate in the, ‘Fair Go for the Coast Petition’ (Express Advocate March 12, 2014 p.3). As the World Bank explains, “Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society’s social interactions. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together”.


So it is on this note that this paper will now argue that the actions of Wyong Coal Pty Ltd, the mining industry as a whole and apparently politicians from both sides of government are, by their actions, creating a weakening in the social cohesion of the Central Coast and this weakening is putting ever more pressure on the raising of social capital.

As the history books can tell us, the mining industry has notably failed to address its global record of corruption and deceit. We only have to look to recent ICAC hearings in NSW to see how this taint of corruption and power broking has destroyed public confidence and along with it the social cohesion that we have noted as being so necessary for the raising of social capital. However, Wyong Coal Pty Ltd seems to have ignored the increasing demands for social justice and transparency on the Central Coast because it has continued with its policy of thinly veiled Realpolitik programs of division and social manipulation that continue to cynically target social institutions and bureaucracy alike with money and promises. This, at best, shows a lack of respect for the existing social environment. However, it may also be read as an attempt to destabilise the existing social order so that another may be imposed.
Political theorist, W.W. Rostow (1990) observes that in history more developed countries used a destabilizing process to spread their ideology;

"These invasions – literal or figuratively – shocked the traditional society and began or hastened its undoing; but they also set in motion ideas and sentiments which mitigated the process by which a modern alternative to the traditional society was constructed out of the old culture". (p.13)

Rostow, it can be said, demonstrates how a dominant 18th century Eurocentric ideology actually condoned that a society be destroyed so that another could be ‘developed’.

It is apparent that here is a policy that is underpinned by the ideal that, “economic progress is a necessary condition for some other purpose” (p.12). Therefore, we can now argue, at this point, that we are able to draw clear comparisons between Rostow’s theory and the actions of Wyong Coal Pty Ltd.

So although Wyong Coal Pty Ltd promises to, “provide extensive economic and social benefits to Wyong, the wider Central Coast Region and NSW communities through job creation and business opportunities” their words and actions have remained empty since their ignorance has meant they have failed to recognise that social capital on the Central Coast is far more than just jobs and business opportunities.

**Barry O’Farrell as Pontius Pilate (Pontius Pilatus):**

“So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’” (Matthew 27:19 ESV)

It has become very evident that the NSW Government is vacillating with regard to Wallarah 2. So although the comparison above may seem rather stretched it can be applied in this instance because, “As has been well canvassed, in opposition O’Farrell and his central coast spokesman Chris Hartcher vehemently opposed the mine and promised it would never proceed under a Coalition government”.


Putting aside any allegations of corrupt practices it should be noted that any vacillation on the part of Government can and is perceived as a serious breach of community consultation. We have already explored the need for social cohesion and its importance to the raising of social capital so what we can draw here is a picture of how the policy being followed by Wyong Coal Pty Ltd, combined with the about face by the NSW Government now stands to prejudice the ability of the Central Coast to develop its own social capital. This picture, if allowed to continue, will mean communities on the Central Coast will become dependent on economic hand-outs rather than on the capital that will they have inherited along with that which they can raise therefore, this will seriously impair the people’s ability on the Central Coast to invest in their future.
The Building of Social Capital:

"Small towns are reinventing their social and economic futures based largely on a combination of the skills of local residents and the assets represented by the land. Forests, farmland, and coastal areas are magnets for tourists, and when coupled with the craft producing residents ... can produce promising economic futures." (Kratzmann, John P. from Reich, John, Zautra, Alex J., Jan 04, 2010, Handbook of Adult Resilience, Guilford Press, New York, ISBN: 9781606234907)

Because the Central Coast is such a beautiful place to live, its people have been granted a legacy that is second to none. The natural resources abound and as they were developed we learned, albeit slowly, how we had to look after them, heal their wounds and provide for their future. Unfortunately, it seems that government and industry need constant reminding that people are their natural resource and therefore, they have a shared responsibility to do what they can to assist the people develop a future which they own.

While the mosaic that is the Central Coast appears to provide a life style that is strong in assets, social cohesion and aesthetics this is the ambience we have already talked about. It is therefore important to remember that while this is the ‘glue’ that holds the Central Coast together its tensile strength is still embryonic and this is what makes it an ongoing process. The imperative we speak about here is that the people of the Central Coast must be allowed to create their own vision for the Central Coast without the perverse influences of power and greed as represented by the extraction industries. It must also be recognised that if Wallarah 2 goes ahead, without taking the social capital of the Central Coast into consideration, then this will politically open the door to CSG extraction in urban areas or even oil drilling off our coast because there will be nothing to stand in their way.

So this paper takes a stand, a stand that asks that the diverse communities of the Central Coast be allowed to explore the physical and social assets that exist today and then determine for themselves how these might be applied to the future. However, for this to happen it means that the people of the Central Coast must be freed from the insecurities and politics of 18th Century ‘Wealth Creation’ so they can determine without the constant display of politics and division how much stronger the community can be without Wallarah 2.

Conclusion:

It can be seen from this paper that the argument being pushed by the mining industry demands that the community place a value on the intangible, so that it might be sold. This argument might also be seen to perpetuate the belief that this is an argument that can never be won because, if history tells us anything, it is that, in Man, Pragmatism rules the heart. Therefore, this paper has demonstrated that although this argument has continued to bedevil social stability through the centuries, becoming ever more strident and divisive, it is today, as can be seen from our thesis, based in fallacy.
Our thesis proposes therefore, that communities value assets that Pragmatists, as portrayed by Wyong Coal Pty Ltd, dismiss (because such assets cannot be valued economically) as worthless however, what Wyong Coal does not recognise is that such dismissal, as we hope this paper has cogently argued, is an exhibition of ignorance. This is why we demonstrated that the mining industry’s argument is a vehicle for **fused discourse**, for as has been previously noted, their arguments and promises merely promote the policy that, “economic progress is a necessary condition for some other purpose” (Rostow).

This paper also demonstrates how the rhetoric and actions of the NSW Government and Wyong Coal Pty Ltd together have been an orchestrated cacophony of cynical expositions designed to become a prelude to the invasion of the Central Coast by the mining industry. However, we argued that the Central Coast has heard all of these empty and unfulfilled promises and arguments before so until the people see a true respect being shown for the Central Coast and its people the rhetoric will remain an exercise in futility.

So it is here submitted that because the aesthetics of the Central Coast and the ambience that it creates has become a priceless commodity to generations of folk, the collective voice of the Central Coast must be obeyed before any major development is allowed in or close to **urban areas**. We argue that there should be no deviation from this commitment by politicians, authorities or bureaucracy since the social cohesion of the Central Coast is critical to the maintenance and creation of its social capital and thus, its social capital is critical to the life style of the Central Coast.

*Therefore, the demands of ‘Economics’ as portrayed by the mining industry can never be allowed to impose themselves upon the proven abilities of ‘Communal’ development’.*

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**References:**

1. Express Advocate, Wednesday March 12, 2014 p.2


