28 March 2014

Planning Assessment Commission
Level 13, 301 George Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000
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Dear Commissioner

WALLARAH 2 COAL PROJECT (SSD 4974)

In June 2013 I made a submission to the Director, Mining Projects, at the Department of Planning and Infrastructure regarding the proposed Wallarah 2 Coal Project. In my submission I made the point that the application currently under consideration is ostensibly the same as the proposal refused by the former State government; a proposal resoundingly rejected by the now Premier when he was Opposition leader. While his stance is not a consideration for the merit assessment by the Planning Assessment Commission, it is noteworthy in that it has added to an undermined public confidence in the management of this proposal and the associated assessment process.

Following the previous refusal of the Wallarah 2 proposal and after the election of a new government, representatives of Kores, the proponent company, advised me they would be revisiting and resubmitting an application for the mine. I asked what changes they had made to address the large number of concerns that led to the original refusal and which would therefore warrant a renewed application. They indicated there were no changes.

As with the proponents, the community has largely maintained their opposition to the proposal. Major concerns still exist around water security stemming from risk to the aquifer that could see loss of potable water, water for agriculture and for environmental purposes. While volumes of information have been made available, the conclusions of experts vary considerably. I do not profess to be able to conclude what level of risk exists, however I prefer to support a position that errs by being too cautious with such a resource than one that sees water as a worthy considered risk.

In previous submissions I made reference to the example of Diega Creek at Wakefield in Lake Macquarie, a smaller creek than those at risk from this mine but a creek that suffered a total loss of water flow when the aquifer was severed by longwall mining subsidence. Examples of such impacts clearly exist, as do examples of other unanticipated failures of mine plans and impact predictions. The NSW Government has just released a report on the circumstances around and impact from such an unanticipated subsidence event that occurred in the Sugarloaf State Conservation Area from mining operations at the West Wallsend Colliery at Killingworth.
No doubt the surface terrain of the areas and therefore, the kind of impacts from subsidence, could be argued to be different. It would, however, seem from the report there is no lesson from this event that can remove the fear of a catastrophic impact to water if an unanticipated event does occur in the area of the Wallarah 2 mine.

I maintain concern for properties that will be affected by associated impacts from surface operations, including noise and air quality reduction. Despite assurances from the proponents in relation to the management of dust from the proposed mine, the reality is there would be few, if any, coal mines close to a population centre where fugitive dust is not a problem, either year round or seasonally. The growing awareness of the impacts of dust particles of PM10 and PM2.5 has understandably brought much greater scrutiny of mining activity and its impact on the health of communities. The Wallarah 2 mine would be very close to many thousands of people and add to air quality concerns within the region.

Impacts on residential areas outside of the Wyong LGA appear to be understated or ignored. Properties within Wyee are in close proximity to surface operations and could be expected to be impacted by noise and dust from time to time. Residents in this location would incur health risks of dust from inhalation, or from rainwater captured from household roofs.

This area is undergoing growth and is a significant part of the strategic growth plans of Lake Macquarie City Council. Growth here has also been supported by Planning NSW within the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy.

Residents of Wyee are, I believe, rightly concerned at the lack of attention given to their circumstances and the potential impact on them from a mine approval.

I have previously placed on record that I am not opposed to the mining industry. I do, however, believe there should be better balance between the needs of residential populations for water, arable land and clean air and the economic argument for coal extraction when there remains a significant supply of coal in areas much further removed from residential populations and environmental risk. For that reason, I do not support the Wallarah 2 Coal Project in the form currently proposed.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Greg Piper, MP
Member for Lake Macquarie
and by email