

Submission Objecting to Bylong Coal Project

I would like to correct some misconceptions that became apparent to me at the Bylong Coal Project (BCP) PAC.

I am a Deputy Captain and Training Officer for Cooks Gap RFB and have been closely involved with maintaining a viable fire shed in Wollar. I have also been assisting in efforts to save Bylong RFB from closure.

The number of extreme fire days have increased in recent decades, as has dangerous fire behaviour. Firefighting tactics employed in this new environment require travelling outside brigade area to hit fires early as well as higher standards of training to improve safety, communications and acquire new skills (e.g. use of aircraft).

The idea that mine personnel can form an effective rural fire brigade without the support of a strong local community, or that those objecting to the mine are not volunteering is an inversion of the real situation.

The proposal that mine management will release workers to respond to incidents is good in theory, however only responding when you are released from work (being paid to attend) is against the principles of volunteering and can never be a substitute for volunteers who formed part of a community, as was the case before mining development.

I object to the justifications put forward in the KEPCOs Social Impact Statement for Bylong that rural populations are generally in decline. The comparable towns put forward in the study (Bylong EIS RTS - Table 7, p.39) are far more remote than Bylong to major centres. Also the dates covered for comparison, early 2000s, was a period dominated by the millennium drought, extended period of low livestock prices and the demise of wool growing. The repeated claims that Mid-West Regional Council area has to have this new mine to combat widespread youth unemployment and constrained business opportunities, should be seen against the background of numerous mining expansions since the 1980s including two new mines developed in the last 10 years. If they are still struggling one wonders how another new mine will make a difference.

Bylong Valley is in within 3 hours drive of coastal region, and 4 hours from Sydney. In most of the surrounding areas productive rural properties are valued in millions of dollars. Without destructive mining developments the future for Bylong is only limited by our imagination and skill.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Imrie