

Submission WEP PAC – April 2017

The planning department has failed this area. This report does not properly consider the full costs and it is blind to the true value of the land, future generations and community. Assertions that *"benefits of the project outweigh the costs"* are based on the questionable premise that mining coal will be able to continue increasing for years into the future and all of this time remains unaffected by modern economic, technological and environmental realities. It is not possible to predict what is going to happen in coming years regarding the economic fortunes of seaborne thermal coal and domestic thermal coal. However we can be sure that business as usual no longer is a viable option and all arguments relying on wealth predictions are bound to be inaccurate. Further mining expansion in Wollar / Ulan area is high risk.

The risk is worsened because there is no plan for what is going to happen after mining ends. Apparently there is no urgency to resolve the vital question of contingency planning. Decisions about what happens after mining will be left to the proponent in consultation with paid professionals and members of the community (who of course will all be donating their time). A plan may be worked out over coming years, but it will be post approval and in a process proceeding at arm's length from any Government leadership or ideas.

Another example of the confused ideas informing this report is Recommendation 31 which:

I quote *"actively encourages employees to engage with the local community, particularly through theRFS"*.

However this is followed by a contradictory statement on page 30:

"given the majority of the workforce resides in areas other than Wollar, the social impacts of mine closure. .. are more likely to be experienced in other areas".

The social effects of industrialisation on Wollar will be managed by "encouraging" employees to boost membership of community organisations like the RFS. On the other hand any social impacts from mine closure are more likely to occur somewhere else!

Mine employees already are involved with the RFS in Wollar. Currently the callout list for shed 3 Wollar has approximately 12 members who are qualified and likely to respond to a fire call or attend a training day. Roughly half of that number are associated with Wilpinjong CM, the rest are locals, residents in Wollar Village or surrounds. Only one member is qualified as Crew Leader/Field Officer and one other with Advanced Firefighter qualifications.

A viable firefighting brigade cannot be maintained and operate safely just by encouraging new membership. Under the Rural Fires Act, only Field Officers are trained and qualified to close roads, enter private property or manage risk. For a Basic Firefighter to become a Crew Leader takes at least 4 years of active involvement, usually longer.

It is unsafe to expect Basic Firefighters to crew a fire truck by themselves and make decisions on a fire ground without direct supervision from a crew leader.

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Employment conditions should not be used to make volunteers go beyond basic training. And it is uncertain whether they will still be here in four or five years. If we are to maintain and grow an effective firefighting brigade for Wollar it is an inescapable necessity that we need to attract and retain members who live here, where they and their family have a long term commitment. Rather than supporting this, the Government is working at cross purposes by approving mining expansions close to Wollar; meanwhile seeking to justify this failure of leadership by saying decline is inevitable.

"The Department considers that it would be reasonable to assume that existing negative social impacts would continue post mining in the Wollar Village. This is because population decline is likely to continue given current trends of small town decline..."

Asserting the inevitability of population decline in small towns is a Sydney centric myth. This is an example of Government planning to fail. Dismissive claims that 'population decline is likely to continue' allows decision makers to distance themselves from the consequences of approving destructive development. Self-fulfilling predictions of rural decline are demoralising to everyone working towards positive change and a viable future for this area.

Do not undervalue the Upper Goulburn River/ Wollar Creek catchment area, nor seek to characterise it as an uneconomic, declining agricultural community. This is a rationalisation leading to a self-serving and erroneous view of this place as only fit for exploitation by mining and blind faith in the mantra '*benefits of this project outweigh the costs*'.

This stops us seeing how this area is blessed by a uniquely strategic location linking Hunter/Newcastle/Central Coast with Dubbo/Mudgee/Bathurst/Orange region.

An important node on the power grid with road /rail connections, a stunning and inspirational landscape, abundant wildlife, solar, wind and water resources as well as a skilled workforce.

The Wollar area and community were not in decline before the advent of coal mining here. On the contrary, at that time the future was only limited by knowledge and imagination

Yours sincerely
Colin Imrie.



11 April 2017