

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT NETWORK

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Address to Wallarah 2 PAC November 3rd 2017

Dear Commissioners

BACKGROUND

The Wallarah 2 project was rejected in 2011 by the then Keneally Government (leading into an election), on the grounds that there were too many risks foreseen and so the Precautionary Principle was applied. The Keneally Government stated that this mine project, after weighing pros and cons, was “not in the public interest”. Simultaneously, the incoming O’Farrell Liberal Government made its ironclad promise that special legislation would be enacted to protect the water catchment from mining. Six years later we are here fronting another PAC and the proponent who is absolutely certain that approval will follow despite many unresolved matters.

Most of the issues already put before the previous PACs are still unresolved. Many of the issues somehow have dropped off the radar of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure who seem to revel in advancing the prospect of this mine.

Other presenters here are focussing on the main argument about loss of potable water through damage to the aquifer systems and therefore long term and also permanent loss of potable water as described in the Department’s recent Residual Matters Report.

AIR POLLUTION AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Walarah 2 record that the air quality of Wyong is very good and that therefore this mine will have a negligible effect upon air quality in the area. They are relying on an air monitor which was spuriously placed at the Wyong Racecourse where no pollutive industries are detected and which is at least 12 direct kilometres(as the crow flies) from the surface facilities near Blue Haven which exist under the air influence of Vales Point Power Station and coal transport and coal pile .

Again what W2 refuse to say publicly for the benefit of those people who live next door at Blue Haven and Wyee and certainly not in their glossy brochures is what is contained in their own consultant’s report of 2013....

“that short term exposure to Particulate matter (PM) is likely to be causally associated with mortality...hospitalisation and emergency department visits for cardiopulmonary diseases, increased respiratory symptoms, decreased lung function, and physiological changes or biomarkers for cardiac changes” (Pope and Dockery 2006 from the EIS Health Appendix M, Page 7).

THE REAL COST OF A TONNE OF COAL

The long term burden that communities face are never added to the costs of coal. This ranges from the real adverse health impacts from pollution in the health system that future generations and Governments have to carry. The price that property owners face in regard to subsidence, anxiety, disruption, loss of amenity are never counted for by authorities. And of course the long term environmental effects where the mine company has long gone are evident throughout NSW. But still Governments are not moved which all amounts to a national disgrace.

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SALTY BRINE DISPOSAL

Salty brine disposal in the Wallarah Creek system and eventually into Budgewoi Lake as suggested in the EIS consultants report is a real disaster waiting to happen. The 5280 cubic metres per annum of semi solid brine extracted from the workings are destined also for underground storage. There are no details once again of this or any suggested effects on underground aquifers or transmission of salt concentrations through strata. We are looking at over 75,000 cubic metres of this brine to be somehow contained after the life of the mine.

DEVELOPMENTS AND JOB CREATION

Darbinjung LALC has also indicated housing developments on their land next door amounting to 1000 new homes or more. These plans are well advanced and the result is that hundreds of trades jobs will be involved as well as servicing. Most jobs on the Coast are in trades, commerce and servicing, as well as tourism. None of these are compatible with this mine proposal.

It has been well demonstrated in the Hunter that mine closures are not advancing and therefore jobs in rehabilitation are being held back and revitalisation of Hunter townships is not being realised. Rehabilitation work should be a natural flow on following mining but the Government and the mining companies are unwilling to expend capital in this area. There are currently many hundreds of jobs being held back because mining companies and the Government show no initiative in rehabilitation.

SUBSIDENCE, AWABA TUFF and the PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

I refer to sections of the ACA's address to the PAC Hearing 10th April this year...in relation to Subsidence and also the Precautionary Principle. Wallarah 2, responding to the 2014 PAC state..

“The subsidence modelling study indicates that the predicted levels of subsidence for the Project are one and a half to two times higher than the predicated levels in Newcastle and South Coast regions. This is a combined result of the relatively weak strata immediately above and below the seam, the deeper depths of cover, the lack of massive strata within the overburden, the relatively large extracted seam thickness and the known instability of chain pillars at this depth”.

Some experimental mine this is... and this is precisely where the Precautionary Principle must apply.

The Mine Subsidence Board in Newcastle voiced serious concerns about coal extraction in the Hue Hue Mine Subsidence District and was of the belief that the Precautionary Principle must apply. They were concerned about the instability and unpredictable nature of the Awaba Tuff, the weak sandy claystone conglomerate responsible for major problems in the Newcastle area and which is directly beneath Stage One of this project which is the Hue Hue area of subdivision where more than 120 homes are affected.

Commissioners need to look long and hard at this revelation as to date it seems to have had no effect upon the DPI's position. It certainly will affect the assets and lives of those residents directly above the first stage of this proposal.

DIRECTOR-GENERAL'S REQUIREMENTS

I refer to the Director-General's Requirements Of 12th January 2012 forwarded to the company and list what I believe to be outstanding issues.

1. "environmental protection" in relation to the mine
2. "cumulative impacts" ..detailed assessment of this key issue.
3. "Subsidence..including a detailed quantitative and qualitative assessment of the potential conventional and non-conventional subsidence impacts ...(including) the respective values of these features"
4. " a detailed assessment of the potential environmental consequences of these effects of these impacts on both the natural and built environment.."
5. "Land Resources.....a detailed assessment of the potential impacts on soils and land capability (including contamination)"
6. "justification for any significant long term changes to agricultural resources (eg alluvial lands)".
7. " a detailed flood impact assessment which identifies impacts on local and regional flood regimes and resultant impacts on agricultural land use, transport, services, habitability.."
8. Other requirements on the impact on human health and social amenity which are detailed in these Requirements.

PILLAR YIELD

The issue of yielding or non-yielding pillars as expressed by Dr Neil Shepherd's frustrations from the 2014 PAC are still unresolved. Whether pillars yield or not changes the nature of subsidence and questions the original documentation of this mine from a "chain of ponds" effect along the valley floors.. to universal subsidence and therefore even more uncertainty about the long term levels of subsidence. This issue is vital to the mine plan. The detailed cross section of extraction should be displayed in detail for general usage and particularly for those properties affected.

The company issued a list of subsidence figures for each of the 245 properties plus lists of potential subsidence on farm dams etc.in Appendix H of the application. Incidentally figures such as a fall in the Jilliby Road main access is 1.75 metres....2 metres for sections of Little Jilliby Creek...1.8 metre

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drop at the Keegan's turf farm....2. 3 metre landfall at a home in Beavan's lane....and 2.6 metre landfall in the hilly backdrops which would lead to landslip. This must be matched by real cross sectional diagrams to match.

CONSULTATION

The Department's claim that WACJV has engaged in consultation in line with current best practice is pure rubbish. The Department merely accepts what Wallarah 2 says without the simplest local research. The company has never held an open public meeting to discuss their proposal. They have never held a public meeting on pollution or on subsidence with any affected residents. Instead they have relied on a stream of glossy brochures boasting their generous donations to organisations. They have had the opportunity to discuss real effects of the mine in their brochures...but have refused to disclose any negative issues. They have been highly irresponsible in this regard and as previously stated, have not addressed the Director-General's Requirements which are quite clear and unequivocal.

CONCLUSION

Commissioners need to look at these unresolved issues. People's lives are at stake. People's assets are left exposed. Health impacts from dust and movement of coal so close to the expanding suburbs. The environmental effects of this mine are vast and long lasting. The future of water supplies and agricultural lands remain at risk from this proposal. Be assured that the community will not rest until full open and robust debate is held in public forums before any decision is made.

Mike Campbell OAM

On b/o CEN

