

*Original*

SUBMISSION TO PLANNING ASSESSMENT COMMISSION

ROCKY HILL COAL PROJECT – SSD5 156

My name is Aunty Susan Syron. I am an Aboriginal Elder in the Biripi Nation with connection to the Worimi Nation and a member of the Cook family. I am a descendant of Jack Cook and Jesse Brummy, First Nation people of the Gloucester area. Jack Cook was an Aboriginal Elder who was born in 1838 and was a traditionally initiated. Jesse (Brummy) Cook was born around 1850 at Copeland.

The Cook Family supports the Department's recommendation that the Rocky Hill mine should not proceed and request the PAC not to approve this mine.

After European settlement, the sad fact is, that our people were subjected to massacres that decimated the Aboriginal population.

Whilst European settlement ultimately meant that the Cook Family was displaced from their lands, the Family maintains strong cultural, traditional and historical ties to the Gloucester region. Many Family gatherings are held at Gloucester. In June 2016, the Gloucester community formally recognised the contribution of Jack and Jesse Cook to Gloucester and Australia's history through the unveiling of an Acknowledgement Plaque. Over 150 Cook Family descendants celebrated this event in Billabong Park, Gloucester.

As Cook family descendants, we are very proud of our links to Country within Gloucester and the surrounding areas.

Gloucester Resources Limited (GRL) applied to the Department of Planning to build a coal mine, known as Rocky Hill, on the southern doorstep of Gloucester and in an area of great significance to the Aboriginal community. The Cook Family lodged a strong objection to the mine.

The law requires GRL to undertake an Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment (including both cultural and archaeological significance) which must demonstrate effective consultation with Aboriginal communities in determining and assessing impacts, and in developing and selecting mitigation options and measures.

By any measure GRL failed woefully to comply with these requirements in their development of the Environmental Impact Statement.

GRL completely failed to undertake any proper consultation with our Family and with other significant Aboriginal groups. The company has demonstrated an unwillingness to effectively engage with our Aboriginal heritage, history, culture and the spiritual dimension permeating all aspects of our life and beliefs.

We acknowledge that GRL has taken representatives of the Cook Family on a visit to the main mine site. However we felt that we were being patronised rather than being asked to provide our knowledge of the significance of the site and broader Aboriginal heritage significance of the area and valley that it lies within.

What is happening with the GRL proposal to damage our Country, mimics the historical relationship between government and our People - relegate, move and dismiss – which we had hoped was now a relic of the past. It seems little has been learned and there seems little interest in caring about Aboriginal culture.

As was the case for GRL's environmental impact statement (EIS), the Department's Assessment Report is a very superficial attempt to comply with legal requirements. There is still no real attempt to address broad Aboriginal cultural and spiritual issues, as opposed to the individual archaeological sites. To just say in the report that:

*"It is only the Aboriginal community that can provide information about the site's Aboriginal cultural heritage significance"*

without really attempting to recognise that significance is totally inadequate and somewhat insulting. The Cook family provided some detailed information about the broader cultural and spiritual significance of the area near the proposed mine and the Gloucester valley in general. Except for acknowledging the significance of Waukivory Creek, that's it, our concerns were ignored.

The Cook family submission contains the following moving comments by Aboriginal Elder Ken Eveleigh who spoke earlier:

*"The Bucketts and the Mograni look down upon this valley; it is a very spiritual and sacred place. You might not see them clearly. If you belong to Country you feel the spirit and hear the rivers flow and you know that your Ancestors are still here with nature and it is not just in one spot; it runs through the valley.*

*Surrounding tribes would come together here for food, marriages, Family ties, hunting, gathering, song, dance, initiation and The Dreaming. There was not one leader (or king) but several leaders e.g. medicine man, lawman, knowledge holder, at these events. You were given your sacred knowledge."*

There is still no requirement for GRL to survey the parts of the site, including the haul road, that have not yet been surveyed before any final decision is made about this mine. There may well be many other undiscovered sites that will be destroyed. Whilst this is bad enough, it is the failure to deal in any meaningful way with the broader cultural and spiritual effects of the proposal which we find to be most upsetting and offensive.

We strongly recommend that the PAC does not approve this mine.