

Why I would like the Planning Assessment Commission to protect Gloucester

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on Worrimi and Birripi land and voice deep respect for the Aboriginal elders of this beautiful valley. The fact that the Rocky Hill coal mine proposal would have resulted in the destruction of 9 sacred sites and the cultural places contained within the Buccan Buccan mountains and the Mograni is incomprehensible and totally unacceptable. The tragedy is that this is common practice within the flawed laws that favour the extractive industries and we fully support our First Nations People in their exhausting fight to protect their cultural and spiritual heritage and sense of place.

I have lived in Gloucester for 31 years with my husband Garry, a local GP and we have raised our three children here, through our local school system until they left to follow their dreams. Like the vast majority of young people, they leave to enhance their lives and one of the wonderful things about Gloucester is that many come back as teachers, farmers, business people and raise their families here. Our lives in Gloucester have been incredible. We live in one of the most beautiful valleys, with rivers to swim in and drink from, platypus, farming lands, World Heritage Wilderness on our doorstep, amazing parks and above all one of the most vibrant and productive communities in rural NSW.

With over 120 volunteer organisations, Gloucester as a community punches well above its weight in all areas of community organising, support networks and whilst there may not be a high income threshold compared to city economies, our quality of life is second to none.

In 2007, I was in the role as Mayor and Chair of Tourism – Gloucester was riding high with 1% population growth and had the enviable position of one of only three rural communities with a strong and positive economic outlook.

A strong relocation/lifestyle/treechange program was already long in place, we held tri -monthly “Welcome to Gloucester” morning teas with the Chamber of Commerce, introducing new residents to our fantastic volunteer groups and letting them see for themselves what a vibrant community we are and how they could get involved. Businesses are expanding as we speak. As an example, Drifta Kitchens now employ approx. 80 people with apprenticeships and are a wonderful showcase for the varied industries we have here.

This is the real Gloucester, this is the Gloucester we are already seeing regrow and bounce back since the AGL gasfield withdrawal, and indeed, since the Dept Planning refusal of GRL – we know people want to relocate here because we are contacted regularly for advice on where the decision is within the planning system for this unacceptable coal mine proposal.

Farmers get it that coexistence is not a possibility – indeed the toxic effects of coal dust on cattle and the products such as beef and dairy are well documented and farms close to mining areas will become stranded assets as their produce will become unfit for market. There is nothing more powerful than a consumer who does not want to buy damaged goods or contaminated food for their family.

Gloucester and Manning valley communities deserve some peace, certainty and a healthy and liveable place. Putting a 220 metre open cut coal mine next to 3000 people, with the resulting dust, air quality, blasting, noise and mental health risks was always going to be a total dereliction

of duty of care. In fact, my words, there is a strong culpability factor within government departments with the known health harms being deliberately and knowingly inflicted on the young, old and animal/agricultural communities across the Hunter and beyond.

We have seen the results of the 2014 Hazelwood open cut coal mine 45 day blaze that covered the surrounding towns in smoke and ash, exposing firefighters to carbon monoxide poisoning, contaminating water and most likely contributed to the deaths in the area - the community are now undertaking a potential class action.

So why would I like the Planning Assessment Commission to protect Gloucester?

Because the Dept Planning have rejected this proposal twice. It does not tick the boxes.

Because in my previous roles as a registered nurse and then Local Government Councillor for 17 years amongst other community roles, I have seen the suffering, anxiety, stress and hospitalisations of community members due to poor decisions by former Ministers Ian McDonald and Tony Kelly and resulting governments and it has been a tragedy.

It is also a tragedy for those who were given false promise of jobs and the resulting disharmony amongst some in our otherwise healthy social fabric.

I, and my family, love this place we call home.

Garry has cared for many, many people over 31 years and still intends to, he has delivered their babies and is deeply affected also by the behaviour of a few.

I will not talk here about all the sad and negative social and personal impacts for me personally and others for trying to protect this community. I realise that is exactly what the extractive industries want to do – stir up the community,

divide and conquer. Well, the great people of Gloucester have more resilience and integrity than a short term mining company that does not care about our social or environmental fabric. We will not let this mine proceed. We have too much to lose. People love this place. We have over 4000 signatures and growing, requesting the removal of the GRL licences. We need this certainty.

Please uphold and respect the majority view of the Gloucester community to refuse the Gloucester Resources Rocky Hill Coal mine application. Thank you for listening.

Julie Lyford