

Planning Assessment Commission
Rocky Hill Coal Project

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The proposed Rocky Hill open cut coal mine and associated activities would have profound effects on the Gloucester Region and these would impact over a significant time span. These effects are both current and intergenerational. They occur in a period of unprecedented climatic and economic change, so we must also look to our future circumstances.

Each area of impact, both positive and negative has been canvassed comprehensively by people with specialist knowledge and by those who anticipate particular benefits and disadvantages.

Over a period approaching a decade, I have been part of a movement that has considered the complex interrelationships that exist amongst these specialist interests. We have sought to match them to the particular resource options we have as a region. Given the current and anticipated economic and climatic conditions, we came to the firm conclusion that any extension of the fossil fuel industry would be significantly damaging to our region. Our research and practical development activity indicated that there is an alternative form of economic development that would not only provide better economic and social outcomes, but would make a better contribution to national needs.

In the brief time available, I will put a bit of meat on the skeleton of this position.

Personal Effects of the Proposed Mine

Medical authorities have attributed higher levels of serious medical problems from the very fine dust particles, small enough to penetrate our bodies' protection measures, and carrying toxic materials into body organs. It is not only the transfer of fine dust but the excessive release of methane that is highly hazardous.

Studies in the United States have linked proximity to fracking of methane-carrying seams to , "40 percent increase in the likelihood of a woman giving birth before 37 weeks of gestation (considered pre-term) and a 30 percent increase in the chance that the obstetrician had labeled their pregnancy 'high risk', a designation that can include such factors as elevated blood pressure or excessive weight gain during pregnancy" and ". . . .11 percent of babies were born preterm, with the majority (79 percent) born between 32 and 36 weeks.". This study by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Research. suggests that these effects are due to the increased presence of methane, the flow of which is enhanced by fracking.

Rocky Hill doesn't intend fracking deep underground coal seams. Their open cut method exposes acres of methane bearing material, blasting it into fragments, washing it with local water and then carting it in open carriers for kilometres.

U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention "... preterm-related causes of death together accounted for 35 percent of infant deaths in 2010, more than any other single cause. Being born prematurely is also a leading cause of long term neurological disabilities in children.

In my former professional life, I worked with children adults and families with such disabilities. The lifelong impact of such neurological disabilities on parents, siblings, professional carers and the general taxpayer is substantial and long lasting.

To really experience the nature of this decision-making process, I would recommend that people concerned go up to Gloucester High School, look at the senior students and imagine telling them that someone is about to make a decision that will put them in a lottery. When they partner and begin building their family and future, they may win the prize of additional birthing problems and their children may be born under such difficulties that they (and their family) will be disabled for the rest of their lives. Similarly, visit the pre schools and schools, aged care facilities.

Economic Effects of Disability

U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention "... Preterm birth cost the U.S, health care system more than \$26 billion in 2005,"

The combined anti-mining associations wrote to Rocky Hill asking them to set up a fund to meet the anticipated costs of medical attention and care for the disabled caused by their operation. They declined.

I once calculated the economic benefit which came when we reduced the disability of one our individual, Down Syndrome students sufficiently for that person to enter normal employment. Eliminating all the pensions and benefits no longer needed and adding income tax contributed by the worker, we saved the community \$1,600,000 during that one person's lifetime. He is still one of those that we placed in open employment.

In considering the personal impact of dust and methane exposure, creating individuals with "long term neurological disabilities", in our future generations and considering the relative costs, this alone would justify refusal of the Rocky Hill application to mine . . . unless the proponents were prepared to declare a quota, a "reasonable number" of additional disabilities to justify the new enterprise, from which they would be the major beneficiaries.

Other Economic Considerations.

1. When protesting began, we were told that there were overriding economic benefits that justified the discomforts of mining close to town. The Gloucester Project did research into the economic situation of rural regions. The most convincing factor was that regions that relied on capital investment from external sources were victims of a business model that was obliged to take more from the region than they invested. In fact this business model had to take every possible step to reduce costs in order to retain the investment of shareholders. This included the cost of local labour.

On the other hand, local ownership of businesses tended to create an economic multiplier effect that had created major economic growth. The Gloucester Project built and trialed an economic model based on further development of a food production and distribution industry. This model which won the NSW Award from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, won major grants from State and Commonwealth sources and won for Gloucester the NSW , Tidy Towns award for sustainability. **So we were able to demonstrate that we didn't need a destructive industry. We could support economic growth, now and in the foreseeable future,** unlike the fossil fuel industry which is under enormous international pressure, and depends on a resource which will, within a given period, be exhausted.

2 The attraction of local jobs was also offered as an incentive. The mining industry is a leader in employee shedding, not just from market fluctuations, but from automation. In Western Australia there are already mines being controlled electronically from Perth. The rapid onset of artificial intelligence and robotics is reliably estimated to eliminate many jobs in the semi-skilled areas available in mining.

3. The impact of unreliable employment situations on the wider community was evident. When Gloucester Coal shed jobs, not only were the families affected, and their disposable income was unavailable to local commerce. Desperate workers offered for casual work, undercutting trained agricultural workers.

Climatic Issues.

1. The Gloucester Project's demonstration horticultural farm showed how local landholders could establish their own small businesses, or economic diversification operations in an area of commerce predicted to be increasing needed because of difficulties due to climatic impacts in other regions. CSIRO documents show that rainfall predictions for Gloucester and the adjacent Mid and North Coast will be generally similar to the present as inland food producing areas increasingly feel the warming and drying impacts of climate changes.

2. Certainly, the need to curtail additional coal mining is an international necessity that needs no further comment here except to make the following points:-

- Gloucester has an alternative economy available, with sound and sustainable ecological and commercial credentials.
- Mining of coal exhausts the primary resource in a limited time, and leaves the alternative resource base, water and land availability, seriously damaged. Gloucester's economic alternative actually conserves and improves the resource base both physically and economically.
- Fossil fuel mining and burning continues to contribute to the worsening position throughout the world, justifying the pleas to leave it in the ground. Major climatic events are already challenging the capacity of regions to repair and restore communities.

Local Landform Issues

1. Gloucester lies in a valley with ridges to the east and west. Martin Babakhan, Newcastle University climatologist and advisor to our pilots in training confirmed concerns that eastern and south eastern air flows create a vertical eddy over the proposed mine site, lifting the emissions. A regular evening inversion traps the air in the valley and combines it with mist. With day warming, the concentrated emissions deposit on the town, (hospital, school playgrounds, businesses etc). Traffic stirs up the deposits again, giving sporting people, dog walkers, children in playgrounds and residents another opportunity for deep breathing. Gloucester has a geographic situation particularly inappropriate for an industry with such toxic characteristics.

2. The mine site is in the valley of the Avon river. Airborne deposits access the Gloucester river. Coal washing facilities cannot be isolated from the water network especially during flooding. Downstream effects are an issue and downstream users and the general ecology will be impacted.

3. We attended a session at Newcastle university dealing with methods of detoxifying seepage from overburden. It is clear that putting a thin layer of soil back on a huge deposit of overburden, does not restore a site. Water seeping down through material from an entirely different era carries into the water systems substances from that era and which are incompatible with life forms which have evolved in the current era. Thus the effluent is toxic and the effect is again widespread and continues for years.

I wanted to show that the information from health specialists, geologists, climatologists, economists, environmentalists and just people hoping to make their fortunes are not separate issues. They all come together in a community and many of the consequences go much wider than the areas of the specialists.

What all the information adds up to is that Gloucester most certainly will not benefit from, a Rocky Hill, nor will Australia nor will the world.

References:

- Naomi Klein [This Changes Everything](#), pp 428 - 429, 486.
- Fracking Industry Study: [Fracking Industry Wells Associated with Premature Birth](#), Oct. , 2015<<http://www.jhsph.edu...>>
- Job displacement. Numerous publications. e.g., [The Rise of the Robots](#) Martin Ford.

