

**Peter Hodges**

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Dear Commissioners

Thankyou for the opportunity to speak today.

Apart from other issues, raised or will be raised, I have 2 main concerns I wish to point out today.

1. Considering this Mt Pleasant mine was approved in 1999, how can it be possible for it to continue through on an extended timeframe without going back to the drawing board?

I remember when this mine was first touted in the early 1990's. There was even talk the coal would be piped as a slurry to Newcastle. Later, in around mid 90s there was an article in the SMH stating the 10.5 million ton run of mine coal per year to be produced at the Mt Pleasant operation was the equivalent of 2/3rds of the UK's total of 16.5million tons coal produced by 132 opencast mines in 1995.

Also as a side note, when Margret Thatcher moved on the English coal industry in 1985 there were 170 underground mines, by the 1995 there were only 19 left in operation. The English movie "Brassed Off" gives a bit of insight into the impact of these closures on the mining communities.

Since Mt Pleasant was awarded its approval in 1999 there has been a dramatic increase in the extended size of open cut mines and also production in terms of tonnage, plus the opening of new mines. Close to 160 million tonnes of coal went through port Newcastle last year, well up on what it was when Mt Pleasant was first approved.

Also we have to remember the bankrupt bogan billionaire Nathan Tinker, ex chairman of Australian Pacific Coal is behind the bidding to reopen the Dartbrook Mine, which is code for Opening up another massive open cut mine west of Kayuga. This mine would be directly north and totally alongside side the Mt Pleasant operation. My understanding is Tinkler still owes \$515 million to creditors and the reason they haven't moved on him is they hope this clown can pull another rabbit out of the hat and clear his debt. Just imagine the interest the Indonesian Salim Group who own Mach Energy, would show if Tinkler's mob decide to sell the Kayuga approval. A mine, alongside their Mt Pleasant operation, which has an alternate access under the Hunter River with an existing washery interconnected to the Northern mainline railway via loading loop, direct rail access to Port Newcastle. Another reason why we need to be careful of mine approvals is the jailing of Eddie Obeid and Ian McDonald. Both are ex MP's. Need I say more.

2) The second issue I wish to highlight is dust. Correlating with the increase in open cut mines, hence production, there is the increase in air born dust. Back in the 1970's those of us that lived on the land had an idea if a southerly front was heading up our way. The upper atmosphere would be clear and blue with heavy dark storm clouds being pushed up under it. Now we know when a southerly is coming because the dirt comes first. Highly visible and if it comes up before nightfall and then calms

down over night the dirt is still hanging around in the upper valley mountains. Lovely clear clean days are becoming a rarity. A local pilot has told me when he comes from the north in his plane and drops over the range into the Hunter Valley there is a dramatic increase in airborne dust.

Why worry about this dust. There is a real possibility at times this dust would contain (amongst other things) crystalline silica. **Silicosis** is a lung disease **caused** by breathing in tiny bits of silica, a mineral that is part of sand, rock, and mineral ores such as quartz. It mostly affects workers exposed to silica dust in occupations such mining, glass manufacturing, and foundry work. It has been revealed in the media of late, trades people who have been working cutting modern stone based kitchen tops have been succumbing to this disease. Considering the Mt Pleasant mine and the possible Kayuga mine are predominately located to the northwest of Muswellbrook, the impact of the usual hot north westerly summer winds is going to blow all this mine dust straight over the town.

Is the dust a product of one's imagination! I don't think so. After a calm night one has only to drive down from Wingen or observe from the Wallington road the individual multi layers of dust hanging over the mining areas south and west of Muswellbrook. It hangs there until a breeze gets up and moves it on. I think there is going to be a real problem if the powers to be keep ignoring this legitimate warning.

Best regards

Peter

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[REDACTED] or [REDACTED]