

AnneMaree McLaughlin

I strongly object to the United Wambo Open Cut Coal Mine Project.

I am a resident of Bulga, a town near the proposed project.

I want to express my concerns that the impacts on people and the environment have not been adequately considered and also my concerns about the mine 'approval process'.

I believe the NSW Government & its Dept. of Planning are confused on the true meaning of 'public interest'.

As it still stands, the people who are impacted the most by open-cut coal mines such as the proposed United Wambo, gain nothing and are suffering loss of health and well-being, quality of life and financial instability.

The United Wambo Project will result in increased hazardous levels of dust and air pollution that nearby residents are forced to endure in what is an already 'overburdened' coal mining area.

In the report there are references to perceived benefits of mining for the community. I see nothing that benefits Bulga.

All is good for the decision makers, the approval givers and the many workers who live away from the mine site or those who willingly choose to rent mine-owned houses in this polluted environment. Residents have not got the luxury of choice.

Residents who are exposed unwillingly to industrial operations from mines day and night deserve to be funded to move. The Mine is after all responsible for their suffering and health repercussions.

But moving isn't a solution for some people in towns like Bulga.

Their town holds their heritage, their family's history or it has irreplaceable ties of friendship and community. Bulga was once historically known as The Gateway to the Hunter Valley but now it is The Gateway to the Hell Holes of Open Cut Mining in the Hunter Valley with 4 super pits at its door.

With this approval the cumulative social impacts and loss of privately owned land and farming operations will further devastate local residents. **This has still not been addressed properly.**

Community members don't have any faith in the legitimacy of these meetings and the 'approval process'.

Approvals are given by Commissioners but always **with strict conditions that predictably require the Applicant to develop plans, list objectives and possible solutions to problems in their path to approval.**

In conditions put forward for United Wambo, the Applicant is given broad parameters in a seemingly endless list of conditions and they have to satisfy the requirements of the Secretary of Planning, Carolyn McNally. However, some wording appears very regularly. Terms and conditions such as: The Applicant must:

- * take all reasonable steps
- * carried out to the required standard.
- * as far as is reasonable and feasible
- * as far as practicable
- * to the satisfaction of the Planning Secretary
- * in timeframe agreed by the Planning Secretary.
- * The Secretary may waive some of these requirements if they are unnecessary or unwarranted for particular management plans.
- * prepared by a suitably qualified and experienced person/s whose appointment has been endorsed by the Planning Secretary.
- * With the agreement of the Secretary, the Applicant may prepare a revision or stage of any strategy, plan or program required under this consent without undertaking consultation with all parties nominated under the applicable condition in this consent.

Now, just from these few examples you could deduce that there is plenty of scope for flexibility for the Applicant to meet requirements or conditions.

You could also deduce that the Planning Secretary, Carolyn McNally must be an extremely powerful and busy person who also holds most of the Approval cards in the deck.

Here lies a problem because the Planning Secretary works for the Department of Planning who make strongly biased recommendations in favour of the Mining

Industry and who also prepares the reports on which the Commissioners refer to in their assessment of the application.

There have been significant problems since the Department of Planning took on responsibility for the Division of Resources and Geosciences in 2017, and with it responsibility for the administration of mining in NSW.

The NSW Government has even resorted to reducing the standards of protection for communities in order to get mines such as this approved.

On Monday Dec 10th, 2018 a fourth whistle-blower came forward in the Newcastle Herald. This time, a specialist who emailed the Secretary of the Department (Carolyn McNally) to allege that senior staff gave her incorrect information about a database overhaul of mining title conditions that left the department "regulating blindly."

It was stated that "In short, they don't have a system of recording all conditions on the state's 5,000 mining and exploration titles, despite the ICAC warning the Department's "weak processes" contributed to the corruption it investigated in 2013.

It also went on to say that "People of principle do not stay quiet when they suspect something might be wrong. And the unfortunate recent state history of corruption and coal mining means the community is right to be on the alert."

All mining approvals underway, like the Wambo United Project, should be halted while corruption allegations made against NSW Planning are investigated.

Also the issue of Final Voids has not been adequately addressed in the Final Assessment.

How can you place a value on land or predict its possible use post-mining when you do not know what to do with the final void? How can Hunter Valley voids be managed in the future when no one really knows the extent of the long term negative impacts on the environment or how it will impact ground water supplies?

To allow mining companies to merely take 'all reasonable measures' to rehabilitate the area and minimize damage doesn't mean it's going to happen.

The Cumulative impacts of Final Voids is massive. The 30 voids in the Hunter Valley have created a barren, lunar landscape.

Assessments **must** include the hefty long term costs of management plus financial and environmental responsibility.

We cannot be assured of any meaningful rehabilitation or solutions to this enormous problem when there is no detailed Government policy regarding Final Voids.

For this reason alone, consent for approval of United Wambo should not be considered.

Finally, Climate Change is perhaps the most important and distressing impact on people and the environment that has not been adequately considered and addressed in the Final Assessment for the United Wambo Project.

To the deniers, there is no climate change — so coal is clean, coal is good, coal is cheap and it's our duty to export it to the poor of the world to give them electricity.

The denier's mind carries this absolution of coal beyond greenhouse emissions, to disregard **any** negative impacts.

Unfortunately, the Government does more than promote climate deniers..... they **are** climate deniers.

Dr David Shearman, Honorary Advisor to Doctors for the Environment Australia and Professor of Medicine at Adelaide University advises that "Future climate policy must be guided by scientific expert opinion and removed from political chicanery by the implementation of new environmental laws which have application to health."

Governments and industry will be held accountable for harms caused by their deliberate disregard **for science, the health of the people and the life systems we rely on.**

Government Departments should be proactive in protecting us not only from the devastating impacts of coal mining in the Hunter Valley but also on a much larger scale, against Global Climate Change.

If approval is given to the United Wambo Project it will result in further destruction and negative impacts to people, the environment and to our precious resource, water.

Just remember the approvals you permit now create damage that cannot 'be fixed' in the future.

Its time for you and the NSW Government and its Departments to choose OUR HEALTH, OUR ENVIRONMENT, OUR TOWNS and OUR FUTURE ...above coal and the proposed United Wambo Project.

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