

Presentation to IPC United Wambo open cut expansion



My name is Robert McLaughlin and I am the Vice President of the Bulga Milbrodale Progress Association and I live in Bulga.

For eight years we have been fighting the expansion of the Warkworth Mount Thorley Open cut mine to save the Village of Bulga. The Land and Environment Court and the Supreme Court said the Warkworth Mine must not be approved because of the impacts on the people of Bulga and the Environment.

Two years after the Courts said that the mine must not proceed the Government through this IPC procedure approved the exact same mine the courts rejected.

You will understand then our anger that the Government has said **this mine** is approvable.....it's right on our north western door step.

* We do not live in an industrial area! This is farming, grape growing, wine making and a tourism area. It is unacceptable to approve an open cut mine expanding into the environment which should be protected... not destroyed! The Mine cannot mitigate the impacts on people living in this area nor on the environment.

This mine application must not be approved

Technical issues

In the past we have commented on the technical issues in an EIS, believing the communities' experts on the technical issues raised in the EIS's would bear some weight and sway your decision making process. History has shown they have not.

The Department of Planning is compromised because many of their officers are ex mining executives and in addition take instructions from the State Government to get mines approved. And the DPE are the ones that **you** turn to for technical advice?!?

No need to remind you of the recent publicity on corruption in the Dept. of Planning but given the history of the DPE and its relationship with the mining industry you will understand the mistrust the community has in reports prepared by the DPE and on which you refer to in your assessment of this application.

* The State Government has altered policies and regulations to reduce the standards of protection for communities to get mines such as this approved.

Air pollution

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The cumulative impacts of dust and diesel in the Hunter Valley are felt every day. The prevailing winter North Westerly winds blow the pollution from the top end of the Valley, down through Muswellbrook, into Singleton and beyond. The summer south easterlies blow the dust from the mines in the South all the way up to Muswellbrook and beyond.

If you approve this mine then you are adding to the pollution in the Upper Hunter.

The EPA in 2013 advised that 87.6% of PM10s and 66% of PM2.5 is produced by coal mining.

The recent EPA Autumn Report of annual air quality trends in the Upper Hunter, states that 11 out of the 14 reporting centres show an increase in PM10s for the last three years.

You must not add another polluting open cut mine to impact on our health.

The recent 12 months of increases in dust pollution in this valley is attributed to the drought. I have no doubt the drought plays a very major role, but the point is that we have open cut mines that are producing dust without abatement during this period, and yet nothing seems to be done about it.

In the five-year review of pollution in the Hunter Valley the EPA report states that this Valley has the worst polluted air in the state (PM10s). And yet the State Government is recommending another source of pollution be approved, adding to increased health problems for the people of the Upper Hunter.

A recent article on the ABC placed the Upper Hunter amongst the five most polluted areas in Australia. This is scandalous. And what is the Government doing about this? They are saying to you go ahead and approve another open cut mine expansion!

Do not assist the rampage of destruction that the state government has set on us in the Hunter Valley. The pollution of our air is not just an issue of complying with some rules. This is an issue of health for children.

If you approve this mine you are contributing to shortening the life of the residents of the Upper Hunter Valley. Reports from the Government's own Health Department and research paper such as Ruth Calgiori's paper University of Sydney and many others refer to this....."There is no safe level of dust."

Health

Keep in mind that this is all about health. The World Health Organisation and the Department of Health NSW also agree that there is no safe level for dust. Anything above zero is a compromise.

Dust causes major problems for our health and in particular the health of our children.

Because of air pollution there are many families in our area who are desperate to leave because of the health effects on both adults and children.

Four years ago a local GP did research and found that the kids in the Hunter Valley were susceptible to asthma or similar respiratory illnesses. In fact one in six suffered these illnesses whereas the average for Australia was one in 24.

When you live near an open cut mine and are in the area or zone of influence and you elect to stay, you have no protection whatsoever for you or your children's health from open cut mine pollution.

Since that research the air quality in the Upper Hunter, as predicted, has become worse.

Blasting

Blasting is another issue which of course is a regular occurrence in open cut mines. The approval states that the blast fumes must not leave the site but it is clear to us that the blast fumes or the results of blasting definitely leave the site. My town of Bulga is in the line of fire from Wambo's blast fumes.

The Decision Making process

Commissioners, the community has little faith in your decision-making and that's not being unkind to you personally, but it is a view of our community that if Government pays the piper then the Government calls the tune.

The Government is pressuring you and others to approve coal mines not only to the detriment of the local area and prime agricultural land, but also more importantly, to the health of the people in the Hunter Valley and the planet as a whole.

Justice Preston Chief Judge of the Land and Environment Court noted in The Financial Review recently, that *constitutions or statutes may provide for certain rights such as the right to life or right to a clean and healthy environment. Such rights may provide the basis for climate change litigation.*

LJ

Of course you will be aware the Government has removed merit based appeals to prevent Courts from hearing **our** arguments. I think that, in the future, affected communities, communities that have been placed at risk, will increasingly look to the courts to adjudicate on these matters.

Perhaps the courts should be the ones that decide the future of some of these issues and take action to protect us from local impacts and global climate change.

Commissioners as I mentioned before, the community has no faith in you coming up with the right decision because the Government will be pressuring you to approve this application.

Nothing we do appears to stop this ridiculous trashing of our environment and our health. All this for the sake of some financial gain for a greedy state government and 'stop at nothing' coal industry.

We are being denied the basic human rights of clean air and a healthy environment.

Conclusion

With the continuing deterioration of our planet and our health, actions will soon be taken to hold to account those organisations, and people, who through their actions or inaction continue to ignore the warnings of the scientists. Justice Preston provides this warning not only to business but to Governments.

Commissioners you have the opportunity here to slow the continuing destruction of this valley and start to reduce the continuing cumulative pollution of the air that we breathe.

Please visit Bulga and talk to the people who are left and you will understand the impact of open cut mines on our village.

You must not approve this open cut mine expansion.