

**United Wambo Open Cut Coal Mine Project (SSD 7142) and
associated modifications (DA 305-7-2003 MOD 16 and DA 177-8-
2004 MOD 3)- D539-18 public meeting**

I would like to acknowledge the Wanaruah people who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay my respects to their Elders past and present and those to come, and I extend that respect to other indigenous people who are present.

1.

I am here today speaking for Wendy Wales who is here in an individual capacity as well as this organisational one but not well enough to do both. It is an honour to step briefly into her shoes for this moment. Like Wendy, I too live in the Upper Hunter, and like Wendy, I am a mother and a grandmother. For the last 20+ years Wendy has worked in the Upper Hunter as a biology teacher and has raised her family. For the last 30+ years I too have worked and raised my family in the Upper Hunter, and I am now a councilor on the Upper Hunter Shire Council. But in her place today I am speaking on behalf of DAMS HEG, that is Denman, Aberdeen, Muswellbrook Scone Healthy Environment Group. We are a group of professionals who feel compelled to make our voices heard on issues of public health and the environment. While our group has different areas of expertise, not specific to this project, our concerns are around life on Earth and the local health of human and other species.

2. Underground becomes open cut.

The proposed joint project between Glencore and Peabody of open cutting the Glencore underground mine is another travesty against our environment. Initially the mine was approved based on an EIS for an underground mine, now a modification is sought which assumes the approval from that EIS but adds significant additional impacts, that were not seen as issues in the first approval. This is death by a thousand cuts, or incremental degradation of the environment. We in the Upper Hunter are experiencing the consequences of these increments in our daily lives, most obvious to anyone is with air quality and visual amenity. Even when Wendy came to the Upper Hunter, more than 20 years ago, and myself more than 30 years ago there was this complicit assumption that we could draw a circle around the Hunter, declare it already sufficiently ravaged as to be going ahead neatly ravaging the rest. This loss of surface habitat, impact on groundwater and exacerbation of existing dust are not acceptable increments.

7. While much of the Hunter Valley is now pock marked with coal mines and the encouraged perception is that Hunter Valley is already done over, we ache for our loss of landscape, miss what was once ours and we realize that it will get worse while people fail to realise our time in history. Our efforts should be squarely focused on moving cooperatively into the future tackling the multitude of environmental and social issues with a fair system of economics-final voids too expensive!!

8. Rural communities

One of the real pleasures from living in the Upper Hunter, is the knowledge of community that we gain. We know belonging to a community is a pretty good shield against loneliness, one of the key underpinnings of depression. As our region has more and larger coal mines inflicted on it less families decide to live here and others have to move away, which for many is an alienating and lonely experience and leaves many of the smaller villages and towns with a transient population.

9. Climate Change Floods and fires they are a thing and they are here across Australia. Our country has never been hotter, many parts of our home are on fire whilst other bits are under water. We are experiencing catastrophic climate change that has catapulted us into a catastrophic climate emergency. There is no denying it – the IPCC has given us 12 years to get our planetary home in order and to keep temperature rise below 1.5 degree Celsius. Here in Australia we are not on track.

10 Our governments need to be properly funding research into the most strategic ways of drawing down the greenhouse gases and how to properly inform the public on the unhappy degree of environmental degradation that has already taken place. The Department of Planning needs to be providing pathways toward a sustainable future, for people and the environment. It needs to be identifying the roles of government, industry and the community to work together with the international community and steer away from climate change inducing industries. Coal is sequestered carbon, it needs to stay in the ground.

The change and adaptation that took place over millions of years here in Australia, has yielded such a unique continent of diverse plants and animals, much of which is still unidentified. And after 200 years we are lucky enough to still have some of it at our doorstep.

consequences, at the same time, Sydney was flooding. Today it's pretty much the other way round. Also, out of the accepted bushfire season the devastating bushfires in California which took out the town of Paradise including 14,000 homes. The Great Barrier Reef has diminished greatly since Wendy first dived there in the seventies ... in fact according to David Suzuki, the eminent Canadian environmentalist, today the Great Barrier Reef has all but died.

Wendy has been to many PACs and a few IPC "Public Meetings" and has been told that the Commissioners make a determination somehow based on submissions. We still cannot understand what criteria are ever applied given the weight of social and environmental evidence presented to the commissioners. The social and environmental costs must be built into the economic calculations, for example if the cost of filling a void renders the project unviable, surely the project is economically unviable, full stop? Why should our kids have to find the solutions to this while they are already in the depths of dealing with all the other environmental problems?

In fact our children across the world (ably led by the 16 year old Swedish Greta Thunberg) have taken to the streets to express their dismay at the way we adults are running affairs, knowingly disrupting their education because they cannot envisage a future if life carries on as 'business as usual'.

We owe to our children and their children to stop coal mining and coal mining expansion. The evidence is in – coal mining needs to be out.

Thank you.