

Alistair Donaldson,

ICPN meeting at Boggabri NSW, 4th February 2019

Regarding Whitehaven's Vickery mine extension.

Verbal submission presented by Alistair Donaldson, lifelong resident of the Boggabri district, a farmer growing grains and cattle to the southwest of town.

Much (or most) of the justification for this project to proceed is based on the potential job opportunities heralded by the proponent Whitehaven. 950 jobs they say. And mostly locally employed people.

The sad reality is that local businesses will suffer again, as the skills and effort they have invested in their all important employees, walks out the door to join the bottomless Whitehaven employment pit.

Whitehaven's employment strategy is best described by their own propaganda literature, and I present their "Skilled versus unskilled" article in the extractive industry magazine entitled ENERGY 2010. I quote ..., "Sourcing these very people requires a particular type of manpower, and so the recruitment drive to SNATCH these workers is in full swing" end of quote.

Well nothing has changed in the 8 years since. I doubt if there was a business through our region that has not been affected from the hemorrhaging of skilled employees. Those particularly at risk are in the non mining sector, e.g. agriculture, agricultural contracting, supply and support, tourism, local manufacturing, retail. Local government, health and education also. Employment in these sectors is often seen as merely a stepping stone to a job with Whitehaven.

Typical examples are...

A Tamworth trucking business with a solid investment in new driver training. Business was sold after the exasperated owners realize that they were inadvertently training drivers for Whitehaven at their own expense.

A Whitehaven workshop manager advising a potential apprentice, that a local motor dealership would be a better option to achieve an apprenticeship, to be employed by Whitehaven thereafter. He admitted that the trade achieved at the Dealership would give the employee far better skills, all paid for by the dealership..

A local dealership now employs Phillipino mechanics, presumably on a special visa, after losing too many mechanics to the mines.

A local contractor to Whitehaven, lost most of his employees to Whitehaven, actively headhunted by Whitehaven whilst working on their mine site. He now works in the agriculture sector on a vastly reduced scale vowing never to return to the mining industry.

Despite the strategy to headhunt the very best employees the region has to offer, Whitehaven struggles to retain staff. Management has admitted that they cannot retain "quality" staff at their Maules Creek mine. Of the original 450 workers that started when the mine opened, it is believed that less than 5 remain. Most of their mining engineers resigned in early December last year. This is indicative of very poor management, and a symptom of a very toxic work environment. After nearly a decade of discussions with miners it is rare to find any one that that is happy in their employment.

So the question has to be asked.....,

In the event that this mine is approved, how is it remotely possible that an extra "950" permanently employed locals can be sourced locally, without scuttling other sectors of the local economy? In the event of a Shenua mine the situation can only get worse.

We now have Hunter Valley mines actively seeking experienced miners from this area. Invariably this will contribute to the high turnover of Whitehaven staff, and putting further pressure on local businesses.

.During the assessment process, must we take the proponents estimation of the net economic benefit? Businesses have closed or have been significantly downsized because of Whitehaven's predatory behavior. Shouldn't we be assessing the economic effects of industry croudout?

Shouldn't we put an economic value on the notion that non mining ventures are not likely develop in our area due to mining industry croudout.

Should we put a value on elevated rental prices, cost of living and cost of doing business that are symptomatic of mining communities.

Should we put a value on the loss of agricultural output from the nearly half a million acres of land now owned by coal mining companies in the Narrabri, Gunnedah and Liverpool Plains local Government areas.

And Finally

Will it ever be possible to put a value on the economic loss that the carbon emissions of this mine would inflict on our planet? As a farmer, land manager and volunteer fire fighter I am painfully aware that something is rapidly going wrong with our climate.

Yours sincerely



Allistair Donaldson

Skilled versus unskilled in the Gunnedah Basin

Manpower – it's the very word that encapsulates the highly skilled mining workforce throughout the Gunnedah Basin.

With the staggering production of coal continuing to ramp up in the shire, so is the demand for workers with skills that stretch across a vast field.

Sourcing these very people requires a particular type of manpower itself, and so the recruitment drive to snatch these workers is in full swing.

Leading Gunnedah coal miner, Whitehaven Coal, knows all too well the process and challenges of recruiting skilled workers.

Not only does the company need to source professional managers and workers in specified fields, but also local employees that may not have the required skills.

For Whitehaven Coal, production is on the increase and with more coal going through the processing plant, the company embarked on a recruitment drive earlier this year.

By large Whitehaven was able to successfully recruit the 50 people it needed to fill the required positions in six to nine months.

With the help of companies like TESA Group and a labour hire organisation, new people have been hired with appropriate skills.

Some of those workers include truck drivers, bulldozer and excavation operators, drillers and rear dump truck drivers.

All equipment needs maintenance, so tradesmen like boiler-makers and mechanical fitters are required to carry out the work.

The majority of those recruited for the Gunnedah mines live in the Gunnedah shire and are aged between 35 and 55 years.

Whitehaven's Executive Director Allan Davies said it's not difficult to transfer a person's skills like a truck driver or small excavator operator to some of the positions required in the mining industry.

"We found we had no real problems finding the right numbers of people filling vacancies for open cuts," Mr Davies said.

The company doesn't shy away from workers who don't have the appropriate skills, however it is beneficial.

"If you're wanting to put truck and excavators drivers on, it's best if they've had that experience because you know they gener-

ally like that sort of work and they end up being more productive quicker than if you are starting with someone with no skills," Mr Davies said.

"They can be totally unskilled but we want them to be safety conscious, know the safety responsibilities and are keen to work.

"If you can find people with those qualities they are definitely candidates.

"We don't necessarily need them to have worked in open cuts, but it's a more productive outcome because you don't have to train them as long.

"But we also recognise as the industry expands, someone needs to train someone," Mr Davies said.

Whitehaven relies on other experienced workers to help operate its Gunnedah mines, which are proving a challenge to recruit.

"Fortunately we didn't have to find any new project managers because we're expanding existing mines, but we're struggling to find mining, electrical and mechanical engineers and environmental people," Mr Davies said.

To build up a supply of those people, Whitehaven offer cadetships to assist those interested in securing the appropriate qualifications at university or TAFE and provide employment opportunities when they are finished.

But the company has a new set of challenges on its hands when recruiting for its new underground at Narrabri, which will soon embark on Stage Two where employees will jump from 96 to 200.

With Gunnedah's underground mines closing years ago, local experience in that area is lacking.

"We have to go searching for experienced people and there happens to be other operators looking as well," Mr Davies said.

"Other operations are expanding and new ones being built so there's a high demand for experienced underground workers."

Whitehaven though must now look at employing some workers to carry out tasks of cutting coal and tradesmen who have never worked underground. A minimum of three months training is required before they can work unattended.

But with all this required manpower, workers need accommodation. That however, is another hurdle for the Narrabri project.



