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Subject: submission - Dendrobium Extension Project (SSD 8194)
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I object to the Dendrobium Extension Project (SSD 8194)

I live in Fairy Meadow, a suburb of Wollongong and have been following concerns about further mining in the drinking water catchments for the last decade. Whilst I recognise the proud history and dependence on coal mining in this area, today's mining is much different to that of the past, with continuing development and expansion of long-wall extraction and its subsequent, accumulative impacts in the catchments. This concern is further increased by our future climate change predictions of increased weather events, including likely longer periods of drought.

The Dendrobium Extension Project seeks approval to mine for 28 years within Schedule 1 Special Areas of the drinking water catchments. In these unprecedented times of climate change, possible approval of another 28 years mining sounds incredibly daunting. The special areas are part of a sophisticated system that provides water to 5 million people within the greater Sydney area. As Clay Preshaw states, in the Transcript of the panel meeting with Water NSW on 26th November (p6) *'It's been said in various places that Sydney is the only major city in the world to allow coal mining this close to its drinking water storages. And as far as I'm aware, you know, there's never been evidence to refute that'*.

Water NSW, under the Water NSW Act, are responsible in relation to water quantity, water quality and ecology in the Declared Catchment Areas. It seems ironic, therefore, that, Water NSW has no legal powers over mining in these areas. In the above meeting, Mr Kershaw states their continuing concerns at the beginning of his presentation, *'So I would say that generally bullish approach from South 32 has continued throughout the assessment process, with very little compromise. And the issues that.. remained in our three submissions have, therefore, remained very consistent.....They cover the key areas of our responsibility.....'*(p7)

Regarding water quantity, Water NSW, in the above meeting, state *'Now, there are a range of other concerns that have been raised about the accuracy of the groundwater model and its ability to predict, accurately, surface water flows – surface, mine water inflows and the percentage of surface water in those inflows.....So, we believe again, that there are some outstanding questions about whether the groundwater model accurately predicts accurate worst case predictions, in terms of surface water losses'*(p9) They go on to say that this project is predicted to double the losses from that already occurring from the mine now. They say this would be about 13 megalitres a day of water loss in the special areas, of which Dendrobium would account for 10 of those 13! No wonder Water NSW find these predictions unacceptable.

If the mine cannot be sealed after completion of the project, then water loss

will continue virtually forever. Who will be responsible? And, anyway, I don't see how compensation of any sort can be acceptable.

There again, if the mine can be sealed, Water NSW raises a very interesting point. *'...over time, post mining, water will start to re-emerge at the surface.....you typically experienced in a highly fractured environment, post mining...you'll have mobilisation of metals and you'll also have the upward movement of whatever's in the groundwater emerging at the surface....if sealing is effective, then you've got the re-pressurisation of the upward flow, potentially, of contaminants, and therefore, a water quality issue. If it can't be sealed, then you've got ongoing leakage and loss of the catchment.'*
p17/18 of above meeting.

Other experts have also aired their concerns about water quantity and water quality. I think we need to listen to all those qualified in this field and take their concerns very seriously.

Regarding upland swamps, I read that of the 46 swamps in the mining area, 25 of these are likely to experience serious or irreversible damage, due to fracturing in the bedrock underneath the swamps. Dewatering of swamps has serious consequences, including losing their ability to hold water and performing a vital role in the catchment system. They are also valuable carbon sinks and are home to specific flora and fauna. Dryland species take over, if the swamps dry out. The system then becomes broken. Off-sets are not the answer. Furthermore, the dried swamps become more prone to bush fires, at a time now when we realise we must take all precautions to avoid being affected by fires such as we had this time last year. And we know risks of serious fires may be more frequent in coming years. By the way, I was surprised to learn that, on the site visit, the commissioners were not shown any of the damaged swamps.

The length of 28 years of this project really concerns me, due to its likely impacts on the Special Areas. Whilst I realise the coal is primarily metallurgic, I understand that only a percentage goes to Port Kembla Steel Works, who also have other sources. Also, green steel is on the horizon, much as advocates for fossil fuels deny this. I believe Pt Kembla Steel Works could be kept going without the need for this long term project, through other suppliers, whilst keeping up to speed with green steel developments. It's also past time our government seized these opportunities and supported enthusiastically development of green steel. I listened to Tony Wood from the Grattan Institute, when he gave his presentation at the public hearing and follow their interest in this topic. I am aware that development for industrial production is becoming more imminent and we, as a country, should be embracing that. It will good for the economy and good for the future of our planet in the longer term.

We must take into account the GHG emissions, including Scope 3, from such a long term project. We have a responsibility for future generations to make every effort to reduce emissions wherever possible, to limit global warming to a level where life as we know it may continue. This project goes totally in the wrong direction. And, assuming any demand for metallurgic coal in 28

years will have seriously diminished, I wonder if it could end up being a stranded asset?

Regarding protection of Aboriginal heritage, it was shocking to hear recently of severe damage to the Whale Cave, of significant Aboriginal cultural value. This damage was revealed when the local Aboriginal Land Council was granted access for the first time in decades. It is situated in sub-tropical rainforest near Cordeaux Dam. Apparently it was damaged by bord and pillar mining in about 1979. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-02/illawarra-indigenous-sites-being-destroyed-behind-barricades/12717976>

In the DPIE Assessment Report, Executive Summary (pxv), I read that 58 Aboriginal heritage sites had been identified in the area directly above the proposed new mining areas, including 23 axe grinding groove sites, 34 sandstone shelters with art and/or archaeological deposits and a single isolated artefact. Whilst acknowledging that there is potential risk of impacts by subsidence, the Department does not consider that the scientific or cultural benefits of avoiding the risk of impacts is warranted. What consultation with Aboriginal Elders was held, whilst coming to this conclusion? I believe the local Aboriginal Land Council oppose this project? It should go without saying, that the proposal to allow this project to mine for 28 years, with consequences to water security and ecology, raises concern in the face of our responsibilities to combat the effects of climate change. Surely, water has to be respected as our most precious resource and protected accordingly, especially in these changing times.

I do care about workers who have depended on mining but feel the government and unions are doing them no favours by trying to hang on to the past. Change is happening and happening quickly. Demand for coal is falling. It's time State and Federal Government worked together, and with unions, to commit to a future far less dependent on fossil fuels - to be progressive in their thinking in developing real, meaningful jobs that will be good for the climate and good for the people. Economically and morally, I consider the short term gains of proceeding with the project would be far outweighed by monetary and environmental costs longer term. And, as we move out of COVID, there has never been a better time for new beginnings. Actions we take now will be reflected upon in years to come. We owe it to those future generations to consider them when making decisions now on projects such as this one.

Commissioners, I ask you to reject the Dendrobium Extension Project.

Thank you.

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