

The Independent Planning Commission Panel,
Level 3, 201 Elizabeth Street,
Sydney NSW 2000
Via email ipcn@ipcn.nsw.gov.au

9 August 2021

Re: Hume Coal Project and Berrima Rail Project (SSD 7172 & SSD 7171)

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to *the Department's Response to the Commission's Letter Regarding Questions on Notice, dated 22 July 2021*. As a resident of Berrima, I provide the following submission below.

Question One

The Berrima Road rail crossing is very heavily utilised and the additional rail movements – particularly those at peak hours – will have a significant impact on the community. It should be noted that the proposed overpass in this location has not been constructed and the timeline for this is unknown.

The additional rail movements proposed by the applicant will have a negative impact on other rail crossings including those that intersect the Illawarra Highway. These impacts will be particularly significant in peak hours with delays for Highlands' residents and businesses.

The Department makes this point clear in its response.

Hume Coal's EIS and the Department's Preliminary Assessment Report note that the project related rail movements would result in additional delays of up to 24 minutes per day at the major road level crossings between Moss Vale and Robertson, with associated road safety risks.

Question Two

As a local resident I fully support the Department's conclusion regarding the impact of the proposed Hume Coal mine on the local water system and reject the applicant's claim that the impact is the same as other mines. The Department has clearly articulated the issue in the Assessment Report and in the response to the IPCN, namely:

"As outlined in the Department's assessment report, the Department maintains that it is the number of affected landholders, the greenfield nature of the project area, the shallow nature of the mine and the aquifers, and the practicality of making good these impacts in a manner that is acceptable to landholders, that is the issue."

On the issue of drawdowns and the significant impact that the Hume Coal Mine if approved would have on the 94-118 privately owned bores identified, the response by the Department when comparing those impacts to other recently approved mines, is revealing:

"..most contemporary projects determined in recent years predict zero impacts on privately-owned bores, or where there is an impact, say in the case of the Maxwell project, the exceedance of the 2-metre drawdown threshold is relatively small."

The specific claim made by the applicant – referencing Tahmoor mine - that the actual impacts will be less – has been discounted by the Department.

"Hume Coal has stated this may prove to be the case for the Hume Coal Project as well – i.e. that actual impacts will be less than predicted impacts – but unlike Tahmoor Coal it has not provided any evidence to support this claim."

Further the Department has restated that the predicted impacts on 94-118 privately owned bores “*should be seen as a minimum*”.

Question Three

The impact of the operation of the proposed mine on air quality of local residents is a genuine held concern, particularly given the scale of what is proposed and its proximity to residential homes and villages.

If the IPCN should take the decision to approve the proposed mine, then stringent conditions must be imposed on the applicant to preserve the existing air quality.

Question Four

The aims, purpose, quantum, conditions and management of any VPA should be publicly exhibited only after a determination of the application.

Question Five

The impacts of the proposed mine on agriculture are significant particularly given the impact on local ground water systems and the negative effect on privately owns bores. This point is reinforced by the Department in its response.

“However, the project’s impacts on groundwater supplies to agricultural land users in the groundwater affectation area could be of more significance. While Hume Coal argues that these impacts would be offset through its make good strategy, as outlined in the Final Assessment Report, the Department is not satisfied that this make good strategy is practical, and that it is likely to result in significant disruption and dispute for agricultural and other groundwater land users in the affectation area.”

As a local resident of Berrima, it is my genuinely held belief that the proposed mine will have a deleterious effect on the heritage tourism value of the village, given the immediate proximity of the surface mine operations.

Question Five

No comment.

Question Six

I note that the information required by the Department to make objective assessment of this question has not been provided by the applicant.

“However, such analysis is based on detailed financial information on project revenues and costs, which contains commercial-in-confidence information. Without this information, which has not been provided by Hume Coal, it is not possible to make a direct assessment of the financial or economic break-even points.”

Conclusion

I restate my strenuous objection to the proposed Hume Coal mine on the basis of the unacceptable impacts it will have, particularly on the local water system. Consequently, this proposal is not in the public interest and the IPCN should uphold the recommendation of the Department of Planning and refuse consent to this proposal.

Yours sincerely,

Julian Brophy,
Berrima