

In opposition to the Hume Coal Project

Fortunately, by far the majority of local people agree with the Planning Department's final assessment, the Hume Coal Project, should not proceed.

People who oppose the Planning Department's recommendations, either naively think they would get a job with Posco or they represent companies that would benefit financially from the mine proceeding. Finally, there is the small number of misguided community members influenced by either peer pressure or by Hume Coal's avalanche of media propaganda and largesse for sporting clubs and charities, who believe coal mining has a future in the Southern Highlands. These people ignore the damage a new coal mine would have on this community.

We live in a democracy and although these people have the right to voice their opinions, surely such a minority should not be handed the right to endanger the social fabric, the viability of existing and future businesses, employment opportunities and the otherwise promising future of the Southern Highlands.

Supporters of the mine tell us that the Southern Highlands has been a coal mining area for over 100 years. Knowing what we know today, that doesn't mean we should go backwards to what was accepted 100 years ago. Many things accepted 100 years ago are unacceptable today.

With the one exception of the Berrima Colliery which supplied coal to the Berrima Cement works for almost ninety years, most of the historic coal mines in the Wingecarribee Shire were relatively small, low production, short lived concerns. Long before the economy of scale came into the industry. This suggest that the area, is not suitable for coal mining.

When it was no longer economically viable, Berrima Colliery was closed down in 2013. Following the mine's closure, ground water flowing through the mine was found to be transferring toxins from the mine into the Wingecarribee River. Since closing down and despite spending several million dollars, the owners have been unable to stop the outflow of toxins.

Fortunately for Sydney water and the environment in general, the owners, Boral, is in a position where it now proposes to pump the polluted water from the mine to the surface where it will be treated and then transferred to the cement works to be used in the production of cement.

As an example of the changing tide against coal, the Berrima Cement Works is reducing its dependency on fossil fuel. The cement works is currently using 30% solid waste fuel and 70% coal which is sourced from the Illawarra. Boral is working to increase the solid fuel waste to the 50% already approved by the EPA. Boral is looking towards hydrogen to further reduce its fossil fuel dependency.

Posco's lease A349 is adjacent to the old Berrima Colliery at Medway. If the leaching of toxins from the Medway Mine leaking from the tiny fissures in the rock can't be prevented by Boral, why should Posco be trusted to prevent leaching into the underground rivers and creeks fed by the aquifer?

Hume Coal's supporters spruik the 300 local jobs that will be created. Anyone who is familiar with the Tahmoor mine should know that despite the miners being required to live within a 45-minute drive from home. Some miners adopt phantom addresses within that distance. In fact, they are commuting daily from areas much further afield such as the Southern Illawarra and the South Coast. Many experienced, unemployed coal miners living in such areas would not hesitate to use such ploys to meet Hume Coal's stated 45-minute radius.

If the Hume Coal Project was to be approved it would be the first greenfield mine to be approved in the Sydney Water Catchment with an unprecedented detrimental effect on the catchment.

Hume Coal continually objects to the DPIE's use of the term "Greenfield Mine" claiming the Southern Highlands historically is an established mining area. The Hume Coal Lease A349 is an unmined lease. If approved it would be a new mine. Therefore, it would be a greenfield mine.

In its EIS Hume Coal made a big deal of the 450 jobs during the mine's two-year construction period. Owing to the need for mine building experience, these workers would come from Queensland and Western Australia. But now, Hume coal conveniently claims during the mine construction period it will employ local workers. If the mine was to be approved what guarantee would be in place to prevent Hume Coal for reverting to its original plan?

History has shown mining companies very often do not live up to their commitments. Why would Hume Coal be the exception?

Please Commissioners, consider the current and future generations who would be deprived of clean sustainable jobs in the event that this mine should proceed.

Rod Blay

