

RESPONSE TO MATTERS FROM THE NARRABRI UNDERGROUND MINE STAGE 3 EXTENSION PROJECT IPC HEARING

3rd March 2022

OBJECTION

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on further submissions from the Proponent and NSW Department of Planning (DOP). I write this as residents across the east coast of NSW and Queensland cope with catastrophic, climate fuelled flooding.

The added information from both the Proponent and DOP represents little more than a series of “make good” assertions that lack guarantee of success and little or no likelihood of replacing “like for like” let alone mitigating adverse impacts.

The Proponent states *“GHG emissions and climate change are not the only considerations that may inform the public interest. The public interest is broad and captures not only environmental considerations, but also the social and economic benefits with the Project”* (Executive Summary Ashurst 25 Feb 2022 The law regarding the consideration of GHG emissions and climate change in determining the development application under the EP&A Act).

However, the Proponent’s commitment or willingness to ensure a just transition for the workers and communities currently reliant on coal mining – i.e., public interest - is ignored. It is obvious that the push for short term economic return regardless of the costly long term social and environmental impacts favours today’s vested interests at the expense of the wider community. Contrary to Ashurst’s assertion (point c. page 3) without consideration of the cumulative and competitive impacts to other operational regional mines, the viability and sustainability of another new mine cannot be assured.

As for the wider NSW community, the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report tells us ([ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/resources/press/press-release/](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/resources/press/press-release/)) *“The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human well being and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future.”*

To hammer home the point, Antonio Guterres said last year *“The alarm bells are deafening and the evidence is irrefutable: Greenhouse Gas emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk This report must sound a death knell for coal and fossil fuels, before they destroy the planet.”* ([abc.net.au/news/2021-08-09/coal-climate-change-gobal.warming-IPCC-report-released/100355952](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-09/coal-climate-change-gobal.warming-IPCC-report-released/100355952))

If one is to accept that GHG emissions and climate change are “not the only considerations that may inform the public interest”, one can still accept that they are the most important considerations in determining the project’s justification. This is a project which will increase emissions as it progresses. The ACF’s recent report ‘Emissions expose: Australia’s biggest polluters are emitting more than approved and getting away with it’ (<https://www.acf.org.au/emissions-blowouts-rampant-in-australia>) claims “Whitehaven was another major over-polluter with its Maules Creek coal mine emitting three to four times more than estimated and its Narrabri coal mine emitting twice as much as estimated”. Such findings indicate flawed assessment, approval, and monitoring processes.

Ashurst spuriously concludes that failure to approve the project would be “incongruous” with the intent of the NSW Government’s policy principles contained in Zero Plan Stage 1 (March 2020) and the Strategic Statement on Coal (June 2020).

The Minister's Message introducing the Zero Plan Document mentions *"this Plan should not be seen as the final word on emissions reduction between 2020 and 2030, but a foundation on which we build"* and the Minister's Foreword to the Strategic Statement on Coal states *"the NSW Government will continue to support the responsible development of our abundant, high quality coal resources for the benefit of the state"*. Further along in that document *"The NSW Government will be proactive in its preparation to adapt to the international trend of reducing carbon emissions by building resilient regional communities that can transition to new economic opportunities."* In terms of responsible coal production, the document states *"Release of area for exploration is not a guarantee of mining: proponents who may subsequently seek approval to mine will still have to obtain planning approval for mine proposals, which includes consideration of the environmental, economic and social impacts."*

Unfortunately for the community of NSW, the DOP response to the Commission and in response to Lock the Gate's Question 7, the DOP quotes (ref Net Zero Plan) –

"The emissions reduction projection do not assume, and the NSW Government does not intend, that all sectors of the NSW Economy will abate at the same rate. The NSW Government's projections also find that the State is on track to achieve this objective on current policy settings. In light of this, the NSW Government policy is that the NSW Government's objective set out in this Plan, to reduce emissions by 50% below 2005 levels by 2030, is not to be considered in the assessment or determination of development and infrastructure applications under the EP&A Act 1979".

This is a most confusing statement, especially considering the EPA was ordered in August 2021 by the NSW Land and Environment Court to act against climate change. The EPA told Guardian Australia *"The EPA is an active government partner on climate change policy, regulation and innovation. It is a part of the whole-of-government approach to climate change embodied by the NSW Climate Change Policy Framework and Net Zero Plan,"* as well - *"The EPA supports industry to make better choices in response to the impacts of climate change."* (<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/aug/26/nsw-bushfire-survivors-win-legal-battle-ordering-epa-to-take-action-on-climate-crisis>)

The project should not be primarily justified because it can potentially create economic benefit. I am reminded of the debacle of the 4th Coal Terminal T4 Proposal for Newcastle Port – a project that had DOP support and was approved against massive community opposition - a major coal infrastructure project that never eventuated because it simply was not needed. Just because a project can be approved, is not justification for approval.

At the very least, both the Proponent and the DOP must produce evidence to show that other existing operational coal mines in NSW cannot provide the resource and employment opportunity this project claims will occur if their project actually goes ahead.

The project should be refused.

Yours faithfully,
Megan Benson.