

Martins Creek Quarry Project – SSD 6612

At 1.32pm on 23rd December, the last business day before Christmas, I was notified that Daracon have offered to make amendments to their planned development under SSD 6612.

I am thankful I have until 31st January to make my submission, but I am reminded of the political adage that if you want something slipped through the radar – do it in January when Australia is at the beach.

Umwelt start their “new information” with a statement of respect to elders past, present and future. I do not see an expansion of a quarry from 300,000 tonnes per annum to 1.1 million tonnes as respectful to the first nations people or the communities affected : human and natural.

Proposed Haulage Rates – variation

The current approved rate of road haulage is 99,000 t.p.a., as per the standing 1991 consent. The “new beaut” revised rate proposed by Daracon of 450,000 t.p.a. is 4.5 times the approved amount, not a reduction. 99,000 t.p.a. moved by road, did not negatively impact the rural nature of our village and our community.

Movements of 140 trucks a day through our village changes the nature of the village from a rural service town to an industrial thoroughfare. Paterson is a thriving rural service centre and tourism hub, 7 days a week, not just on Saturday when Daracon are offering not to haul gravel.

The submission suggests that there may be days when there are no trucks – it doesn’t matter the change in reality and perception will happen if this project gets approved.

Knowledge of the quarry operations and limits

Daracon suggest that because Mr McNalley & Mr Ashton knew there were trucks moving through the village, it makes it all right to propose these road haulage rates. I repeat that when these two men bought their properties and when we bought this property, the approved quarry extraction was 300,000 t.p.a and 99,000 t.p.a able to be transported by road. Daracon also know that these were the limits when they took over operations and commenced quarrying in 2012.

Daracon totally ignored the limits without regard to the law or the community and extracted far more than the approved 300,000t.p.a. and distributed far more than the 99,000 t.p.a by road. Daracon’s response to the judgement against them was to apply for a Sate Significant Development, others response to Daracon’s illegal activities have been to leave the district.

Corporate citizenship

The safe operations of a quarry and the ongoing rehabilitation of the site require a financially strong company. The Hunter Valley has a number of mining operations where the rehabilitation of the mine site has not been carried out and the government has no way of making the company pay, so we the taxpayers will pay.

The rehabilitation bond B60 to B64 of SSD 6612 only provides for an amount that covers the rehabilitation of the site as it is currently disturbed. Is this just Daracon disturbance, or does it include disturbance by Rail Corp? It then provides for an estimated rehabilitation cost for the next 3 years of operation – what about the next 22 years? B24 is very weak with regard to the situation if the site is not satisfactorily rehabilitated.

As Daracon is a private company I do not know if they have the resources to undertake rehabilitation, do you? Have they undertaken rehabilitation in the 10 years they have operated the quarry? Neither of these issues have been addressed in any documents from Daracon that would give the community assurance that they would & could rehabilitate the site.

The additional information provided.

1. Regional Market Demand

How do we know that the current 1991 consent is uneconomic? P.10 I have not seen any financial justification for this statement.

We are farmers and operate within sustainable principles that the land will be better when we leave than when we arrive. The implicit rationale behind Daracon is to maximise their profit at the expense of those around them, both human and the natural world.

Should we as a society comply with such corporate rationale – I say no. Let's access the earth's resources in a sustainable way so there is bounty for future generations.

2. Road v Rail

Again it seems to me that the major objection Daracon has to rail transport is the impact on its bottom line. There is rail capacity & the completion of the inland rail route will certainly free up capacity. The cross docking of product at Hexham from rail to road, so haulage is on a major road is sensible for the community.

3. Transport and haulage route - noise

I am not in a position to discuss the CREAL decision.

However, I am in a position to raise the issue of noise along the route.

Umwelt state that the project will not result in unacceptable noise along the haulage route. P.17

I dispute this – Old Duninald, the oldest house in the Hunter valley restored and opened as a B&B, has a significant attraction as a quiet destination. The house is 355 meters from the road & yes we hear every truck – unacceptable noise. Further, the consent, subject to the Independent Planning Commission does not even consider noise along the haulage route. B7 – B9 refer to a noise management plan which only relates to the quarry operations and not to the haulage.

Have a coffee in Paterson and try and have a conversation whilst the trucks roll past – not possible. The noise is such that the conversation must pause.

There is confusion in the document – at one point they refer to haulage Monday to Friday & no haulage on Saturday. I can't see any proposal relating to Sunday - is there haulage on Sunday? Is it constrained in any way?

4. Transport & haulage – impact on characteristics of the towns and residential developments along the haulage route.

p.19 Umwelt assert that the road through Paterson has been utilised for gravel haulage for many decades without ill effect – yes - 99,000 t.p.a NOT 450,000 t.p.a.. It is completely disingenuous to claim that the amenity would not be impacted by the proposal any more than in the Rail Corp days. How can 4.5 times the yearly traffic not impact the amenity in the village and the value of assets along the haulage routes.

A) Where is the consideration for farms – value and safety aspects? It would appear that the SIA did not hear these concerns.

A farm block in a rural community has a lot more value than a rural block in an industrial environment.

I keep thinking that Mr Clay Preshaw asserted that the Department had carefully taken into account, as required by the Act, the Social, Environmental and Economic impacts of proposal embodied in SSD 6612 and thought it was reasonable to have 280 trucks a day on our local roads and through our villages. It is beyond belief. Further, 140 trucks a day through the villages and along our roads have as much impact on us. It impacts on our ability to provide a safe working environment and it seriously impacts the value of our asset.

Our historic rural property has significant value within a rural community – not in an industrial environment.

b) “Overall, the current road network is assessed to be generally satisfactory for road safety issues” – it feels like a Mr Preshaw assessment. Try and cross the road in Paterson when the trucks are “running” ; try and cross from Paterson Rd to Tocal Rd across the bridge when the truck is turning in; try driving along Martins Creek Rd; Butterwick Rd; Paterson Rd...all routes that the trucks use. Nothing feels safe with a truck & dog coming the other way. These roads are designed for cars.

c) Concern for the community should provide for continual rehabilitation of the quarry site otherwise there is negative impact on the air quality of those that live near the quarry. I note that Daracon believes it appropriate not to rehabilitate until the end of the project..p23

5. Continuous improvement of mitigation over the life of the project

Any approval should be “gold plated” from the beginning. Any damage to the fabric of the community can not be repaired either during the life of the project or beyond. As I have previously asserted the Hunter Valley is dotted with communities that have paid the price of mining development and no longer exist.

6. Viability of businesses along the haulage route.

I for one would find it difficult to continue to support the businesses of Paterson with trucks rumbling by continuously.

On the other side of the equation, I do not believe my BnB would continue to attract the guests that I currently get who want to get away from the city and the noise.

7. Road improvements

I don't see that any of the proposed improvements are to be made before quarrying commences.

I also don't see any road works to alleviate my safety concerns round the intersection of Paterson Rd and Tocal Rd and the bridge safety aspects.

What's been left out?

Heritage

SSD 6612 – provides for Protection of Aboriginal Heritage. This is great but I in no position to say if there are sufficient safeguards.

There is no mention of European heritage, hence no obligation to undertake a heritage study and make a heritage plan.

The village of Paterson has significant value as for its heritage. The majority of heritage items in NSW are locally listed & it is up to the owner to manage and preserve this heritage. Duninald and Old Duninald and their surrounds are listed under Port Stephens Heritage Register. We spend money to maintain these properties, not because of monetary gain, but of a sense of responsibility for our heritage, both built and natural.

Biodiversity

This gets scant mention. Yet the December 2022 document lists the significant number of quarries in the area.

The “boiling frog” principle is in evidence in the Hunter Valley and the law supports the outcome. Each proposal is looked at in isolation, not in a cumulative way.

What is the impact of further mining (I include quarrying) in the Valley on:

- 1) Human health
- 2) Animal welfare
- 3) Plant and animal extinction
- 4) Air quality
- 5) Water quality
- 6) Social cohesion.

It is a cumulative impact on all of the above.

In summary

I urge the Commission to reject the application by Daracon to operate by anything other than the 1991 consent, This consent was seen as appropriate to minimise the impact on the community. There may be some flaws in the 1991 consent as stated on P24. So fix these.

None of the flaws mentioned the quantum of extraction or the methods of haulage.

Julia Wokes

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30.1.23