



TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING

**RE: HVO NORTH AND SOUTH OPEN CUT COAL CONTINUATION
PROJECTS (SSD-11826681 & SSD-11826621)**

MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE COUNCIL MEETING

PANEL:	SIMON SMITH (Chair) JANETT MILLIGAN MICHAEL CHILCOTT
OFFICE OF THE IPC:	STEVE BARRY BRAD JAMES KENDALL CLYDSDALE CALLUM FIRTH TAHLIA HUTCHINSON
MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE COUNCIL:	CR JEFF DRAYTON (Mayor) DEREK FINNIGAN SHARON POPE THERESA FOLPP
LOCATION:	ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCE
DATE & TIME:	11:00AM – 11:45AM WEDNESDAY, 8 th JULY 2026

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

MR SIMON SMITH: Good morning.

5 **MR MICHAEL CHILCOTT:** Good morning.

CR JEFF DRAYTON: Good morning.

10 **MR SMITH:** Excellent.

MR DEREK FINNIGAN: I'll just talk about, firstly, the overall position, Sharon, and you can talk about the rest, and I'll just do a little bit on how we ...

15 **MS SHARON POPE:** Yes, yes.

MR SMITH: Good morning. Are you ready to begin?

20 **MR FINNIGAN:** Thank you for taking the time to join with us today, we greatly appreciate it. We do feel very strongly about this project. And we're grateful to have our Mayor, Councillor Jeff Drayton with us. Sharon Pope, Director Environment and Planning Services. And Theresa Folpp, goodness gracious, who does a lot of work in this area. And myself, Derek Finnigan, I'm the General Manager here. Sorry, Theresa.

25 **MR SMITH:** Thank you very much. Before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge that I'm speaking to you from the Gadigal land here in down south, and I acknowledge the traditional owners of all the lands from which we virtually meet today, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

30 Welcome to this meeting today to discuss Hunter Valley Operations North and South Open Cut Continuation Projects which are currently before the Commission for determination. The Applicant, HVO Operations Pty Ltd, is seeking consent for the HVO Continuation Projects.

35 The project involves continuation of mining at the Hunter Valley Operations Mining Complex until the end of 2045 for the North and 2042 for the South, including an extension of approved areas for mining and mining of deeper coal seams. The Hunter Valley Operations Mining Complex is an established multi-pit open cut coal mining operation located approximately 24 kilometres northwest of Singleton in the Singleton and in the Muswellbrook Shire local government areas.

40 My name's Simon Smith and I'm the Chair of the Commission Panel, and I'm joined by my fellow commissioners, Janett Milligan and Michael Chilcott. We're also joined by Steve Barry, Brad James, Kendall Clydsdale, Callum Firth and Tahlia Hutchinson from the office of the Independent Planning Commission.

45 In the interests of openness and transparency and to ensure the full capture of information, today's meeting is being recorded, and a complete transcript will be produced and made available on the Commission's website. This meeting is one part

of the Commission's consideration of this matter and will form one of several sources of information upon which the Commission will base its determination.

5 It's important for the commissioners to ask questions of attendees and to clarify issues whenever it is considered appropriate. If you are asked a question and are not in a position to answer, you may take the question on notice. Following the meeting, the Commission will advise you in writing of any questions taken on notice that the Panel considers requires a formal response. Any subsequent response or information provided to the Commission will then be published on our website.

10 Thank you very much for introducing yourselves. Just for the purpose of the recording in a second I'll ask you to each just say your name and role, so that the transcript can recognise your voice when you are speaking later in the hearing.

15 But first, may I welcome the Mayor in particular, we appreciate your attendance. And when you introduce yourself, would you mind just giving us a verbal declaration of any actual or potential personal interest that you may have in the project which is something I understand is required for elected officials to do in this process. So perhaps, Mayor, if you wouldn't mind just introducing yourself first and making that declaration about any personal interests.

20 **CR DRAYTON:** Thank you again, I thank you again to all the commissioners for providing us this opportunity today. I'm Jeff Drayton, the Mayor of Muswellbrook Shire Council, and I do have a declaration to make, so I have a family member, and my daughter-in-law in fact who is an employee at Hunter Valley Operations.

MR SMITH: Thank you. Thank you, that's fine, very good. And could the other representatives of the Council please identify themselves for the record?

30 **MS THERESA FOLPP:** Yes, my name is Theresa Folpp, Environmental Planning Officer at Muswellbrook Shire.

35 **MS POPE:** Sharon Pope, the Director of Environment and Planning at Muswellbrook Shire Council. I make an obscure declaration of interest – I'm regularly travelling between Maitland and Muswellbrook, and the Lemington Drive upgrade proposed by this project may be of benefit to me.

MR SMITH: Okay, thank you for being so transparent.

40 **MR FINNIGAN:** Derek Finnigan. I'm the General Manager here in Muswellbrook Shire Council.

MR SMITH: Fantastic.

45 **MR FINNIGAN:** No declaration for myself.

MR SMITH: That's great. Thank you. So, we have circulated a draft agenda, but I thought what might be the best use of time, we've been looking at the letter that you, Council, originally submitted when the EIS was exhibited, where you raised a whole

lot of issues in that letter. I guess the most important thing for us is to know which of those issues, if any, remain unresolved from your perspective.

5 **MS POPE:** Sharon speaking. We feel that there could still be more included in the conditions of consent regarding the use of the buffer land, and we think there should be a more contemporary condition regarding closure planning. And the only other matter that we really have outstanding is the planning agreement.

10 **MR SMITH:** Okay. Would you like to just elaborate one each of those three so we can understand your perspective?

MS POPE: Would it be possible for the Mayor to give a brief overview of our position and then we progress to the detail?

15 **MR SMITH:** Sure, that'd be helpful, thank you.

20 **CR DRAYTON:** Yes, thank you. So, I'll concentrate on, just briefly on the certainly the social and economic impacts, and the reason I do that is because we probably haven't experienced – in fact, not just Muswellbrook Shire but the Hunter Valley has experienced probably at any point in any determination from any mining company, a decision that we say is probably as critical as this decision in where we are, certainly, well, where we are currently with the economic transition.

25 We already know and understand I'll stick to the Hunter Valley Operations Project itself primarily, but we all know where we are, what's ahead of us, only three, three-and-a-half years away, that will start in 18 months with the closure of what is the largest coal mine in the southern hemisphere. BHP will also have the closure of the Mangoola Mine. So, we anticipate about 12,000 job losses with that.

30 We only experienced last week, in 18 months we'll see the closure of Ashton Mine. There's about approximately direct and indirect about a thousand jobs there. So, we're up to 13,000 jobs. And of course, Hunter Valley Operations, we had – sorry, we have currently the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project is currently awaiting a decision from the High Court on whether that project goes ahead as well. Some direct and
35 indirect jobs there of about 5,000. And there's about six/six-and-a-half thousand direct and indirect jobs at Hunter Valley Operations.

40 So, of course if you had those figures up, the worst-case scenario, Hunter Valley Operations doesn't get up, and the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project doesn't get past the decision of the High Court, we have then a position where more than 50% of the entire industry, entire coal industry in the Hunter Valley, by 2030 will be no longer, will be gone. And in and around about 25,000 jobs, which again, equates to about half the jobs that are both directly and indirectly employed in the coal industry.

45 So, we certainly see this as a critical point. It's not the last critical point. Unfortunately, we're probably going to be dealing with lots of critical points over the next few years, but we certainly see this one as a critical point in the economic transition – not just the economic transition, but that social transition or social impact, I should say, of our community.

5 So, I guess we've been working really hard at trying to manage these closures. To be honest, and I'm not saying we do anticipate this closure, but I just wanted to impress on you the importance of the economic value that Hunter Valley Operations not only gives to Muswellbrook Shire Council and Singleton Shire Council primarily, but the broader Hunter area.

10 And just some really broad figures, 1.76 billion, this one mine in 2025 directly contributed to the economy in Australia, and 1.2 billion spent on top of that on annual goods and services. So, we're talking about an incredible amount of money.

15 In the community in the entire broader Hunter region of about 700,000 people, it's some sort of spend, and I think it's probably unchallenged with any other industry, that economic spend or the economy that not only that mine but the industry, but certainly that mine, the benefit that mine is to that broader Hunter Valley area. So, as I say, I just wanted to impress on the Commission that the importance – it really is a critical time, a critical decision at a critical time for our communities moving forward.

20 I guess there is, you know, there'll be a number – moving forward, there's obviously people who support it and people who don't support it. But, yeah, I guess at the moment we're probably living that, you know, we're living the decision, we call it, I'd say you'll probably hear from a number of people who even thought about transitioning and what ...

25 But a couple of things. We're already in the process of transitioning, already ... So, people talk about transition or talk about where we're going to end up, you know, if this mine doesn't get approved. We're already heading there. So, we're already there, they talk about it as something that might happen, we're already living it, and of course our concern with this decision is that not only will it fast-track it, I'm of the view that I don't think it's something that communities in the Hunter will be able to absorb. I think it's, as I say, it's critical enough that we'll see the failure of some communities, pending some decisions on these projects in the next few months.

35 That is about me on economic development, economic benefit.

40 **MR SMITH:** Thank you very much, that's a very helpful overview. Maybe we can now turn to the other matters that you mentioned, because we're just aware that this one's been a long time in the process and there would have been a lot of discussions and negotiations between Council and the Applicant and involving community perspectives as well. So, it's important for us to know the latest status on those matters that you consider have not been fully resolved.

45 **MS POPE:** Thank you, yes. So, for us, the buffer, use of buffer land is quite an important issue for the Council and the community. The mines within Muswellbrook Shire and to some degree, Singleton Shire, own extensive tracts of land, some of that is held as buffer so that they aren't impacting neighbouring properties with noise, dust and light pollution, and those holdings are generally managed as agricultural land.

Different mines are putting in a different level of effort in managing that agricultural activity. Some of the mines do really well. So, one of the mines closer to Muswellbrook, Bengalla, has quite active management of their river flats to use the land for cropping, and quite a healthy herd of cattle that they sell each year. They even employed an apprentice who has been going to Tocal College to learn about farm management. So, in a way, I suppose, Bengalla Mine is held to be a good example of a mine that manages agricultural productivity on their landholdings.

We would like to see the conditions of consent include more metrics to be able to measure or to give Hunter Valley Operations a target for what they should be achieving when they manage the agricultural land in the buffer areas of their mine. And that would then help Council staff and any auditors going on site to actually check that they are managing that land to its best potential and not just using it for extensive grazing and not putting much effort into maintaining its productivity.

And one of the reasons behind that is at some point when the mine closes and that land does become available as farming land, if it has been managed really well, there's been good weed management and ongoing use of fertilisers, repair of fencing, those sorts of things, it will be more readily available for farming activity at close of mining.

That then moves onto closure planning.

MR SMITH: Could we just stop and discuss that issue, so we can just understand it properly. Janett, did you have a question?

MS JANETT MILLIGAN: Look, thank you for that, that was really useful. I think I'm remembering in your original submission to the Department, you talked about an ambition to use some of the buffer land for more productive purposes. I think you talked about employment use of the lands. Can you just tell us what your thinking is currently? So, you've talked about the future agricultural use of buffer land or the current management and the future use, but you also raised other use of buffer lands. Is that still the current issue?

MS POPE: It is. As Mr Mayor mentioned, we face the closure of the coal mines at different times in the future. It is important to start getting new employment opportunities into the Hunter to replace the jobs that we will lose coal mining, and we need those jobs to actually be created before the mines close.

There are sections of this site that adjoin the New England Highway and obviously the Golden Highway, but probably the New England Highway is its better address, that might be suitable for other uses. Whether they're industrial-type uses – I suppose we don't want to step on the toes of Singleton Council and what they might have in mind, or what they want in their area – but certainly within Muswellbrook Shire, we have a pilot currently underway with the Mount Arthur site, and a lot of that detail will become public hopefully from mid-July. But we are looking at how some of their buffer land might actually be able to be used now for various manufacturing and industrial uses before the mine even closes. So, we're quite advanced in doing a Master Plan, showing the road network, and planning for infrastructure that might be required for industrial uses.

Slightly different parcel of land, but it's much closer to a town and it's closer to water and sewer services. But the HVO land, as I say, does have interest to the New England Highway which is very busy, and they certainly would have rail access as well. So, there may be potential for other uses to start on that site before the mine closes. And I think that's part of our next point on closure planning. The condition of consent the Department of Planning is recommending is quite focused on closure planning as in post mining, and we think that that condition should actually say "planning before uses on that site should happen before the mine even closes."

MR SMITH: Sure. So, let's just ... Have you had any discussion with the company about this issue of use of the buffer lands?

MS POPE: Not with HVO, other than what has been in our submissions. The parcel as it is within our council area probably isn't suitable for industrial-type uses, it's mainly land within Singleton Council.

MR SMITH: Okay. All right. But your general point is that under the heading of closure planning, it shouldn't be just about the physical landform post-mining activity, it should be thinking about the economic transition that's in the region.

CR DRAYTON: If I can, it's Mayor Jeff Drayton, if I can. Glencore particularly has been very direct with us in regards ... We have the Mangoola Mine which is fully owned by them and operated by Mangoola in our shire, and Glencore have been quite clear about the nervousness in regards to accessing or opening up that consent and what might happen, because of course the conditions at Mangoola are conditions we're familiar with everywhere, you know, everything goes back to grass and trees. And we just see that when those conditions are imposed, it doesn't – it then, all it does then is solidifies their issue about, hang on, these conditions are now imposed, we don't want to revisit them to do something other than grow the grass and trees.

So, if a condition was there that would have some flexibility around, certainly some encouragement around then talking about what we might or might not be able to do with that buffer land, it would be a much better position for both councils, or certainly for the area, to be able to have those conversations.

At the moment – and I'm not critical of Glencore so much for doing this, but there is a real nervousness about opening or revisiting that condition of consent once that decision is made. I think our desire, this Council's desire is to in some way impose a condition that doesn't, or certainly that lessens that nervousness a little bit about revisiting that condition.

MS MILLIGAN: So, you seem to be saying a couple of things. One, at a minimum you're looking for a condition that requires the Applicant to maintain the buffer zone as potentially good quality agricultural land. And notwithstanding that, you'd also like a second layer that commits them to be investigating other productive uses of the buffer land. Is that what you're saying?

CR DRAYTON: Yes, that's correct. And of course that could be easily determined by the quality of that buffer land, whether it's good enough obviously for agricultural land or it's more suitable and both in a geographic position as well where it's more suitable to industrial land rather than agricultural land, yes.

MR CHILCOTT: Can I get a clarification? Just a clarification for me. As you were talking through those scenarios, it seemed that you'd had a very general concern in relation to buffer lands associated with a suite of mining operations. I think, Ms Pope, I thought I heard you say, "but in relation to this application, it's probably not as relevant or there's not as big an application." Did I mishear you or did you say something like that?

CR DRAYTON: I think, no, it wasn't that it's not as relevant, it was that we hadn't had those conversations with Hunter Valley like we had with Glencore more generally.

MS MILLIGAN: I heard it slightly different, if I can clarify. I thought what you said was, that you didn't have as much of the buffer land in this application.

CR DRAYTON: Yes, sure.

MS POPE: That's correct. The site is very large, it has got some really high-quality river flats, they are within Singleton Council area. It has got some lesser-quality land adjacent to the New England Highway and most of that is in the Singleton Council area. And the land that's within our Muswellbrook Shire Council area would be marginal agricultural land and probably is being managed more as biodiversity offsets, which is an acceptable use as well.

And I think that's the thing with such large sites, it's not going to be a one-size-fits-all approach, but to help the whole of the valley, at least the Upper Hunter Valley maintain agriculture as an industry sector, we would like to see more of the mines managing those parts of their sites that have got agricultural potential, to their best potential and not just – I don't want to use the word "let them run down" but if you just graze them with minimal management, you aren't maintaining that agricultural productivity.

MR SMITH: And does Council have a view on – you mentioned Bengalla is exemplary in this regard. Where would – if they're getting 10 out of 10, where would Hunter Valley Operations be scored?

CR DRAYTON: Good question. Five, 10 out of 10.

MS POPE: Probably about 5. We get to see most the land adjoining the New England Highway, we don't get to see what they're doing on the river flats so much. So, when you go out on site for your inspection on the 15th, that might be something you ask to have a look at.

MR SMITH: Sure. And have you ever raised these issues with the company?

MS POPE: Not directly, we don't get invited onto their triple C. We don't have many touch points. This application has given us that opportunity to put things to them, and they've obviously had their consultants speak with us while comparing the EIS.

5 **MR SMITH:** Thank you. Okay. That's been really helpful. Can we move on from the buffer issue into the second issue that you mentioned, which was connected with it, that's the sort of post-closure preparation and so forth. What are the key live issues there?

10 **MS POPE:** I think Mr Mayor has given most of them. The current condition of consent that the Department of Planning has put forward very much talks about rehabilitation and is talking about closure planning in that sense of, you know, rehabilitation post mining. But what we have found with managing the mines here in Muswellbrook Shire closer to town, we would like to see a more contemporary
15 condition of consent, and there is one – is that Mount Pleasant Mine or Mount Arthur.

So, the Mount Arthur Mod 2 that was recently approved, the condition of consent there actually spoke of a Closure Social Impact Management Plan and was asking them to consider the social and economic impacts of closure and how they may be lessened,
20 whether that's through running programs in the community to help other businesses with that, what's going to happen with the mine closes and the mine is no longer their major client, through to what parts of the site will actually be able to be redeveloped for employment opportunities. So, we would like to see essentially the condition of consent that has been used for Mount Arthur Mod 2 used on the HVO approval as
25 well.

MR SMITH: Thank you. Any questions about that?

MR CHILCOTT: No.
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MR SMITH: That seems very clear. So, the third point you mentioned was the status of the Voluntary Planning Agreement, I think.

MS POPE: Correct. Correct.
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MR SMITH: Could you expand on that?

MS POPE: Yes. So, we raised this quite early with the mine, that we had expectations that we would be offered a planning agreement as more of the other mines in the Shire do. The mine was very reluctant and at some point has actually offered a contribution
40 which is well below what is common.

So, we know that our council area is a small part of the holding, but we have a similar situation here with Dartbrook Underground Mine, which all the surface mining is in Muswellbrook Shire and part of the underground mining is within Upper Hunter Shire. And Upper Hunter has a planning agreement with Dartbrook Mine that is probably the target we would have with Hunter Valley Operations. Predominantly, the planning agreements they form would be with Singleton Council and that community gaining
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the bulk of the community benefit, but we would expect similar levels of community benefit to Muswellbrook that we see Dartbrook giving Upper Hunter.

5 I think that's probably harder to understand and it is in my mind even trying to explain it, we have got documented that, we will provide that in our written submission. With our planning agreements that we have with other mines and with renewable energy projects, we usually get our contributions annually rather than a single lump sum. And we've adopted that policy partly from a cashflow perspective for the proponents, but it does help our planning for our Annual Operations Plan and Delivery Plan, knowing
10 what income might be coming in or not coming in each year.

We have a Community Benefit Fund Policy where we are now actually looking to pool contributions so that we can deliver projects for our community that are both financially sustainable for Council but actually give a bigger bang for buck for the
15 community. And a lot of those projects now are, considering this transition issue that over the years to 2050 we are expecting the mine employment numbers will go down, and that we need to have replacement industries.

20 So, we're spending a lot of focus on STEM for children, so the education of children about other opportunities and different sorts of jobs in the area. We're certainly trying to promote the need for more children to consider careers as electricians, and seeding industry so that they look to other employment, not just mining, into the future.

25 With this mine, they actually do own a holding of land in Muswellbrook Shire that would be well placed on New England Highway to potentially be used for an employment-generating activity. So, Council would actually be agreeable to negotiation with the mine, that if they are reluctant about a cash contribution in line with our expectations, that we would perhaps contemplate a land transfer instead, so that strategic parcel of land in Muswellbrook Shire could be managed by Council.
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MR SMITH: What's the latest on your discussions with the Applicant on this?

CR DRAYTON: We've had a number of discussions about the parcel of land, in particular. We haven't progressed it further. There's certainly discussions that are
35 continuing and, I mean, this process has probably come up is during those discussions. So, we haven't finished discussions, and they certainly haven't said no, that's for sure. And they've certainly been accepting in some way of that proposal. We just got – we obviously haven't got to a final stage yet.

40 But it's certainly, it's a parcel of land that is adjacent to one that Council already owns, so it's right on the highway, and certainly would be strategically for Council would have a much better economic benefit than of any one-off payment that certainly Hunter Valley Operations might make to Council. As I say, purely because not just for the value of the land but for the position of where the land is positioned directly adjacent
45 to some Council land, sorry, to land that Council already own.

MS MILLIGAN: And would the land transfer be in lieu of monetary payments, or in addition to?

CR DRAYTON: No, we'd see, with this parcel of land, we see it critical enough that it would be in lieu of that, not as well as a payment, yes.

5 **MS MILLIGAN:** And if I can just recap to make sure I understand the history and where you're at. So, you have about 3% of the land, sorry, the mine site, but I think in your argument was you have a much higher, perhaps a three times higher percentage of the workforce.

10 **CR DRAYTON:** Yes, we have about – the direct workforce about four or five times that percentage of the direct workforce. But the, one of the keys for us is the support, so the service network. So, a large amount of employees and businesses that service that Hunter Valley Mine are based in Muswellbrook Shire.

15 **MS MILLIGAN:** Right.

CR DRAYTON: They get a lot of support services from Muswellbrook Shire, yes, to support the mine.

20 **MS MILLIGAN:** Which is why – sorry.

CR DRAYTON: There would be many more people that service that mine who live in our shire rather than even direct employees of that mine.

25 **MS MILLIGAN:** Okay, thank you for that. Which is why the Applicant offered you a lump sum upfront of, I think, 203,000 initially, you asked for 50 a year, they're offering 40 a year or a lump sum of 215, and you continue to talk with them with a view that the land transfer would be your preferred position. Is that it?

30 **CR DRAYTON:** We have had – I don't know whether we've been – certainly the conversation I've had at the moment is that the land transfer, purely about just haven't progressed the talks so far, we haven't progressed the talks that the land transfer would be in lieu of that money, purely because, you know, for us it was – it was one or the other, we just haven't got there yet frankly.

35 **MS MILLIGAN:** Thank you.

MR CHILCOTT: And could I ask, what is your next planned step in terms of discussions with the Applicant – when is your next meeting scheduled or what is the process ...

40 **CR DRAYTON:** The Applicant's been a little bit busy lately, so they've been a little bit harder to get to. So, we haven't got any meetings planned. We speak to them regularly, so HVO Operations are a regular attendee at our Chamber of Commerce, the once-a-month Chamber of Commerce events, and we generally try and organise a
45 meeting in and around those visits, because they bring a number of people from the mine to those events. So, yes, we generally try and organise a meeting around then. But they're certainly – we haven't got a meeting planned with them any time prior to the hearing next week, albeit it would be good if it was critical, we could certainly do that, for sure.

MR CHILCOTT: Thank you.

MR SMITH: So, are there any other questions on the VPA side of things?

MR CHILCOTT: No.

MR SMITH: Great. So, they were the three issues you mentioned at the outset. Are there other issues that you, from looking at our agenda or otherwise that you would like to raise with us?

MS POPE: I wouldn't say they're issues but they were comments we'd like to make. In some instances, they're actually in support of what the mine has put forward. So, housing and accommodation was a matter that was quite significant to Council. We have obviously a number of projects under construction or about to commence construction and we already have quite critical state in the short-term accommodation market, which means flow-on would be an increase in rental – a decrease in rental affordability, an increase in rental prices in Muswellbrook, which we don't want, because that would push low-income households out of the area.

The Department has taken that on board and have asked for a Construction and Workforce Accommodation Strategy which aligns with a condition we now have with lot of the state significant applications for renewable energy projects. So, we were, we wanted to just note that that condition is something that Council supports.

Greenhouse gas emissions, we are aware that recently the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water has a new gas monitoring network on trial in the Upper Hunter. This will give a better understanding of greenhouse gas emissions probably originating from within the different mines, hence why we've been picked as a pilot location. We note as part of this project's negotiations, that HVO project has actually re-designed the project to avoid areas of potential high greenhouse gas emissions, and we're very supportive of that having occurred. And we're very supportive also of the pilot trial for the monitoring system.

Dust and air pollutants are a big issue for the community. This mine, while the actual pit isn't visible for most of the travelling public, the dust that is generated from this and other mines is at times very visible, and it can actually detract from the town's efforts to encourage people to live in Muswellbrook, because people feel it's a dusty environment and not good for their health. So, anything that helps us in improving air quality and manage greenhouse gas emissions is supported.

I did mention Lemington Road earlier. Whilst the re-construction of that road has got the potential to increase travel times for some of our Muswellbrook Shire residents and businesses, the fact that the new road will give us a crossing that is generally flood-free excepting more extreme floods, would be an improvement on the current situation. The current crossing of the river closer to Jerry's Plains is frequently inundated and impassable. So, the extra travel time, I suppose, we are saying is compensated by the fact that that road should be available almost 100% of the time each year.

CR DRAYTON: Yes, we absolutely support certainly that crossing there. The crossing is a well-used crossing, certainly it is the only bypass in and around any accidents as well on the New England Highway. It's also the connector between Singleton Shire and Muswellbrook Shire, it's a connector into our Shire, so certainly we see only advantage with that bridge being built over the Hunter River, that Lemington Road bridge over the Hunter River down there. In fact, we think it far outweighs – any benefit far outweighs any negative effect it might have on travel times.

MS POPE: And as a final comment, the Hunter River is quite a degraded river system. A lot of the riparian vegetation has been removed over the past 220 years. So, we would always welcome any opportunity to see riparian vegetation restored to the banks of the Hunter River. And that was probably our main comment.

MR SMITH: Were there any other questions?

MR CHILCOTT: Not from me.

MS MILLIGAN: No, no, that's helpful.

MR SMITH: Yes. But you zeroed right in on so many important issues. We're very appreciative of your time and the points you've raised to us. And I think you mentioned you were going to be making a written submission that will have a bit more detail on some of those, the background of some of those things.

So, one final question. On the VPA, has the company – I'm just interested, presumably from the company's perspective it's looking at the two local councils in which its operation is based. Are they thinking, or have they said anything to you about relative contributions between the two of you, or the rational basis for how they deal with each council?

CR DRAYTON: No. We're not aware of any of those conversations.

MS POPE: We don't currently have a planning agreement with them, and I think they're quite reluctant to be entering into a planning agreement. But I think with those discussions with the Department of Planning, they've conceded they should offer us something. [Cross-talk] appears in the Department's Assessment Report.

CR DRAYTON: In fact, if anything changes between now and our submission, we'll obviously include that.

MR SMITH: Yes, I mean, it might be helpful if you wanted to – any analysis that you've done about the total contributions that Muswellbrook gets from other mines that are wholly within Muswellbrook, that would be very useful background for us.

CR DRAYTON: Yes, okay.

MS POPE: Yes, and with our written submission, Theresa has actually gone – the two mines that adjoin the Upper Hunter Shire are within Muswellbrook, but are giving, will

have a planning agreement with Upper Hunter Shire. She has gone through what contributions they are making, and I think what we are asking for from Hunter Valley Operations is very reasonable in that context.

5 **MR SMITH:** And I guess I'm assuming your letter will also elaborate the basis on which your VPA is sought, you know, in terms of the costs incurred by Council as a consequence of their new activity.

10 **CR DRAYTON:** Yes.

10 **MR SMITH:** Okay. Good. All right. Well, we have no further questions. Are there any other points that you wanted to make while we're together?

15 **CR DRAYTON:** No, I don't think so, I don't think I have, no.

15 **MR SMITH:** All right. Well, I'd just like to say thank you very much for your time and we'll end the meeting now. Thank you.

20 **CR DRAYTON:** No worries. Thanks very much.

20 **MR CHILCOTT:** Thank you.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED