

IPCN Public Hearing

Notes:

Hume Coal Project



My name is Barry Arthur. I am the Manager of Environment and Sustainability with Wingecarribee Shire Council, and I am making this statement today on behalf of Wingecarribee Shire Council. Council made a submission on the Hume Coal Project EIS in June 2017. This submission was adopted by Council and it is from the submission that I talk from today. I will not read from the whole submission but just a number of points, to keep my time to a minimum. I will however submit a copy of the whole submission with the IPCN.

Policy Position

1. Wingecarribee Shire Council (Council) has been concerned about the prospects of a new coal mine in the Wingecarribee Shire (the Shire) since 2010. Council has adopted a policy of opposition to any new coal mining because of the concerns it has over potential impacts on groundwater, water catchments, agricultural land and tourism. Council has adopted many resolutions since this time that reflect this long held position. Most recently in 2016, the current Council reaffirmed this position, declaring the Shire as a Coal Mine Free Shire and placing signage with this declaration at the Shire's entry points.

Background and Local Introduction

2. The Shire is a peri-urban area located in the Southern Highlands of NSW, covering an area of 2700 square kilometres. The LGA comprises rural, semi-rural and urban areas including historic towns and villages. It also contains many natural areas including National Parks and State Forests. The Shire is considered to be a biodiversity hotspot and is one of the most bio-diverse regions in Australia.

Regional Significance

3. The Shire is located on Sydney's doorstep in the Sydney to Canberra corridor. Much of the Shire's current growth and opportunity are being driven because of these regional influences, and the Shire is not in the need of a growth stimulator such as the mine proposed by Hume Coal in this EIS. Rather the impacts from a new coal mine put some of these regional opportunities at risk.
4. The majority of the Shire falls within the Sydney Drinking Water Catchment area, and the integrity of this catchment is critically important to the residents and economy of greater Sydney and NSW.
5. Protection of the region's water assets is fundamental for the agricultural industry, and these are the foundation of our future growth and economic opportunities.
6. The Shire is ideally located for agricultural business in terms of transport routes to markets in Sydney, Wollongong and Canberra, with fresh produce easily moved to all three locations. This in turn provides opportunities for expansion into international markets.

Mining History put in context

7. The EIS mentions in a number of places about the mining heritage of the region which may give the wrong impression about the character and nature of the Wingecarribee Shire. Council refutes any implied justification or normalisation of any new coal mine in the Shire. Yes, there is history of mines in the Shire which featured in a historically economic benefit to the Shire.
8. Whatever historic role mining played in the past, it bears no resemblance to the current and future role this region must now play in providing essential peri-urban functions to Sydney and the corridor to Canberra. Locating a new coal mine in the region now has a much greater consequence compared to putting a mine in the region 100 years ago. This region is

strategically important to Sydney and NSW and will become increasingly important in the years ahead. Any implied normalisation of a new coal mine through any historic relationship needs to be rejected.

Visual Impacts and Tourism

9. The Southern Highlands is renowned for natural and rural beauty. The combination of natural landforms, highly scenic rural landscapes, and extensive historical features, are key elements of the Southern Highlands Tourism brand.
10. Tourism is well-established and is one of the key economic drivers for Wingecarribee Shire. Along with the natural, rural and heritage appeal of the region, our tourism identity also includes a growing food and wine sector and niche market appeals such as the identity as a wedding destination
11. It can be argued that one of the Southern Highlands' key tourist attractions is the historic village of Berrima.
12. Berrima, located approximately 2km from the Project Area, is one of the best-conserved towns from the colonial period in Australia. It has a significant collection of State Heritage Register listed properties concentrated in a small area. The surrounding landscape and rural setting is integral to its attraction as a tourist destination. The uniqueness of this village attracts a sizable number of tourists a year, which has a flow effect for the rest of the Southern Highlands. There are fears that an impact on the tourism appeal of Berrima could be felt by across the area.
13. Protecting visual amenity from a project of this scale cannot be achieved by any amount of conditions of consent. Even tree plantings will not remove this impact. The undulating nature of this Shire will mean that the mine will be visible at numerous vantage points across the landscape.
14. Even glimpses of views from the motorway of mining infrastructure and activity that have negative connotations, impact on the perceived aesthetic qualities of the landscape. The proposed coal mine and associated railway would be visible to Berrima and Southern Highlands' visitors entering and leaving by the Hume Highway (as well as potential visitors driving through on the Hume Highway). It is foreseeable for the area to become associated with 'the mine' and potentially lose its appeal.

Economic Development

Council takes the Shire's economic and jobs needs very seriously, and is committed to promoting a sustainable economy and sustainable jobs for our residents. At the time of Council's submission the Shire's unemployment rates are relatively low at 3.1%, and I believe the figure is currently at 3%.

15. With respect to the Hume Coal Project, there are significant elements of this projects that add risk to the Shire's Economic Development opportunities. Among these are the risks to our water resources, the Southern Highlands brand of our agriculture, and the Southern Highlands tourism appeal. At risk are numerous sustainable jobs, both now and increasingly into the future.

Impacts on Water Resources

16. The impact on both surface water and groundwater resources is one of the most contentious parts of the proposal. It was always known that a new mine was going to impact these water resources. The community has been concerned about these impacts from the start of the

Hume Coal Project, and this has been a key message of the ongoing public concern. The EIS reports and successive reports have not silenced the debate on the impact on water. The EIS shows a high level of impact on ground water resources, triggering Aquifer Interference Policy provisions across more than a hundred bores. This level of impact, from a relatively small project, is unprecedented. This predicted impact alone is alarming and a strong indicator that this is now the wrong region for a new coal mine.

17. Council is also concerned that the mining method proposed by Hume Coal to try and reduce the groundwater impact is largely new and untested in Australia.

Social Impact

18. The social impact from the proposal is a major concern for Council. The Hume Coal project is already having a significant negative social impact to residents of the Shire, and Council strongly disagrees with the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) conclusions put forward by the EIS.
19. Over the last seven years, the threat of a new coal mine has caused considerable distress to some members of our community. This concern has extended well beyond the hundreds of property owners in the exploration area, but also to residents and businesses across the Shire. Residents have been well informed and well organised in campaigning against the proposal because of the potential impacts from a new mine. The community have organised campaigns, rallies, public meetings, information sessions, public 'gate post' signage campaigns, and petitions throughout this seven years. Considerable fear and anxiety exists in some of our community over the impacts that a coal mine would have on their environment, their properties, their farms, their livelihoods, their health, and their way of life.
20. Many in this locality have already had poor personal experiences with Hume Coal. This has ranged from having their properties earmarked for exploration, the miner wanting access to their properties and bores, forced arbitrations, property blockades and even court cases. This community are not radical activists; rather it includes farmers, business people, property owners, parents, grandparents, families, locals (both short term and long term), and people who love this area and who want to protect it. Their concerns are genuine and well-grounded and relate to impacts on the region's important groundwater resources, agriculture, businesses, tourism, biodiversity and character.
21. The Hume Coal Project is already having a physical and mental toll on residents in the Shire. Residents have described their feelings of anxiety, fear, angst, depression, traumatisation, helplessness, uncertainty and stress. These types of social impacts are unlikely to quickly disappear. No amount of tree screenings, barriers, 'making good', offsets, buybacks, or any other conditions of consent are likely to resolve this social impact, nor turn the project into a no impact mine.
