

Submission to NSW Planning. Dartbrook Mine MOD 7 Beverley Atkinson, [REDACTED]

**Amplified from presentation at IPC 9.4.2019*

In honour of the Wanaruah people, who nurtured this land, I object to Modification 7.

I've worked with engineers in England on aspects of fitting motorway structures into rural landscapes of high tourism value. I live in Scone downwind of the site, and I see it often.

**UK work: Travers Morgan, Lond: Conwy, A55 North Wales, and Newark bypass, England.*

The Tourism asset of the Hunter Valley is in great danger from MOD 7. AQC's Environmental responses conceal the ugliness and risk of this; it's a gamble in the tightest part of the valley.

**Research into Dept. Defence mapping, sightlines, site zone visits by roads.*

North of Muswellbrook, mining context changes; the valley floor narrows and everything on it is visible from above.

**Flooding pushes most habitation up onto mounds or foothills away from the river.*

Mt Pleasant mine shows us the shocking visibility of mining into the foothills.

**I am aware that ipc knows Mt Pleasant well, and this is sensitive. However it must be said that the effect of demolishing the hill facing Muswellbrook is now acknowledged as visually disastrous and irrevocable. That can now be used as a cautionary fact, since it cannot be undone. Most importantly Mt P. MUST NOT be crashed northwards through the scenic Castle Rock Road towards Kayuga, breaking into the northern valley. The present Mt P. views show exactly how such a move would be starkly visible for 25 km north, affecting the entire appearance of the Upper Hunter Valley. If the contemplated open cut of Dartbrook is allowed to follow the removable detritus of its u/g mine, as advertised and on ASX, that heap would rise way above the crash-through level, and dominate the valley view from all directions. This is not spoken of. Because the effect is not generally anticipated.*

Screening can't work here as it might down south, so one cannot believe AQC's yellow dots on a map, curiously labelled 'view screened by river vegetation'.

**If a map doesn't make sense, maybe the research is thin. Before/after photos would be more convincing, taken from at least a dozen viewpoints including highway and highest homes, as well as the top storey of the high school St Josephs. Assertions re sightlines could be demonstrated by section drawings from contour maps.*

**The noise map too, reveals little. Truck noise rises in the quiet, and echoes round the hills.*

The drama of the Upper Hunter is the way foothills and steep escarpments face each other across rolling farmlands. Travellers enjoy a rare stretch of farming country enclosed between high, wooded horizons; one of the most beautiful in Australia. But AQC wants us to believe that all transport corridors have 'low environmental sensitivity'. So, they say, does a spectacular hilltop lookout site; currently it's a concrete plant in the wrong place; it'll move.

**hilltop viewing points; this one is south of Aberdeen. There is one north also. The AQC work shows no awareness of beauty, for purposes of tourism, occupation or simple enjoyment.*

The amazing valley view draws people to live on the Aberdeen hillsides. But AQC claims that the view only matters at nearest windows. AQC says trees would hide the 3 storey high metal shaft-shed, but from where? We'd be looking at parking areas for 50 cars and many B Doubles, roads, servicing, amenities, fuel. Maybe mounds of non-coal as well. And still hanging over us is the threat of a vast mullock heap around an acid lake, dominating all valley views, and restricting floodwaters.

**I was at meeting 7.4 where proponent and his website/ASX were clearly contradictory.*

The site is at a pinchpoint where the 10km valley floor narrows like it does at Bickham.. to a neck of under 6 km. This neck accommodates the highway, the railway, vital agriculture, two essential access roads, the Hunter River, and three catchment streams converging to join it. Nearby Aberdeen looks down on all this; to me it looks more sensitive than Rocky Hill. And it's soggy. A 1978 map shows 4 streams rising here, and sinking again. Any mine dug across that narrow neck has to be a sump. In the 1920's, a troubled coalmine closed for the final time in this area, as recorded in the Thematic History of Kyuga. Approval in 1991 was a mistake we pay for now.

**Today I realised the corollary of the convergence of the streams into the Hunter. It is that further south of the Browns Mtn line, the 6km neck continues to contract.*

It reduces to only around 2km between rises, where the lowest foothill from the line of Castle Rock Road projects furthest to the east. Add overburden of an open cut at Dartbrook, and any floods must be greatly exacerbated along the whole of the northern valley, pouring in from its catchment of three surrounding mountain ranges.

Heritage, cultural and archaeological potential are rich in this neck zone, but AQC downplays this. Any true respect for history, nature and inhabitants, here, would totally prohibit open cut mining.

**Tim Owen's findings of ancient remainders can be added to by local knowledge and even by recent discoveries. AQC claimed that aborigines wouldn't have bothered to live by the little streams, so the only archaeology would be very close to the Hunter River..(not mineable). Actually, the neck of water and bordering high dry lands would have been the very point chosen by them, as Owen says, and so also for the Europeans; the 1978 defence map shows a much more intense cluster of dwellings and buildings around Kayuga than in the Mount Pleasant area. The Mt Pleasant Heritage Study by Tickle had hundreds of items noted for heritage record, many of them recommended for retention in situ. I'm sorry but I cannot read AQC's heritage report, having heard its executive summary by the CEO. The thematic history of Kayuga was among heritage studies by/for Architects Tropman and Tropman over the 1990's, including a study of the three homesteads 1992.*

MOD 7 multiplies the current land take by five, and it exposes more coal to air than longwall. More dangerous gas would affect us and our farms. There may be concrete vent stacks. How big, how many and where. How do they work in fire and flood, and are they also, screened by trees? Scone already gets sulphur and dust from 30 km south. Dartbrook is 10km from us, same direction. So poor Aberdeen! And the rising truck noise would spoil every teaching day at its 2 schools.

**By land take, I mean the white markings on the works map, indicating addition of bord&pillar to the existing pink strips of longwall. Most disconcerting is the vast grounds left apparently untouched around the land-take, within the apparent site boundary, the red line. The land is consistent with plans for overburden, considering the statements of intention made by the proponent, and his attempts to purchase surrounding lands. No screen trees would hide that mountain. Nothing would.*

The proponent suggests that dust comes from other sources, so more would not matter. Not so.

The St Josephs Catholic High School sits on the top of a steep rise just east of the River. Its teaching buildings, and those of the Primary School adjacent, are directly in line with the noise rising from the constant truck movements. NB, these might average one every 3.5 minutes, but the fact of the matter is that many trucks would therefore be driving at the same time, and when not driving they would be filling, receiving, waiting etc, with their diesel engines running.

This noise is not acceptable, nor is the constant cloud of pm10 and pm2.5 from the dust and the diesel, being breathed by all at school, including service people, teachers and students. For some students, every day of their entire school life is to be subject to discomfort, disruption and pollution of the air they breathe.

I don't know why the Schools are not more in evidence in the response to this. I expect the detail has not been examined, and consequences not thought out past the possible annoyance of parents who may get their school fees from mine jobs. Will miners tell the kids to put up with the noise, or will they switch schools as complaints pile up? Better that the schools complain now than later. Their lack of research now should not be exploited by the State Department wanting royalties, either.

The school community is part of the valley community which has not been informed and consulted at all, by the Applicant, who has a responsibility to carry out and present good consultation. The process is inadequate, and so any current recommendation for approval is invalid and suspect.

Approval of MOD 7 creates a precedent which the State and Shires cannot control.

Bord and pillar surely would change the detailed work footprint, contrary to AQC's statement. Filling its final cavities with water is one stated plan, but who can be sure that water movement wouldn't spread pollutants into the alluvium, the aquifers and the Hunter River.

**Bord&pillar is far less productive, as stated by all, and while allowing flexible reaction to conditions, accidents etc, it allows expansions, and substitution zones after backouts. Meanwhile it appears strategic, so the poor yield becomes the excuse for 'having to' open cut in order to feed the family etc. (The basis for retaining the huge extraction licence matching the open cut possibility, was stated by the CEO as getting yield from investment, 7.4.19.)*

Not in the strategy is how to look after the changed workforce and protect the immediate town and entire valley from vastly increasing impacts and dwindling prosperity.

The sulphuric acid formed in the mine, interacting with seam slopes, aquifers and alluvium, may also affect bores. Certainly, the report of polluted streams has come out already.

I hear that mine workers used to stand deep in water, but were told to keep quiet about it. In Aberdeen, people tell us of the gas problems, sirens and fire engine attendances. Maybe, consulting the formal records of accident and emergency might show AQC and Planning Depts that further mining just doesn't belong at this place.

**Accounts above are from senior local people in conversation, names could be supplied.*

Thankyou. BA

from Bev Atkinson [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

By now, readers in NSW Planning will know more about the factual details of this application than I ever could. The Application itself is of course a major health hazard. Many of us feel sick, seeing the implications, and also what we are up against... an interim recommendation.

Since we can't know it all, I ask that your knowledge be combined with our questions. Our ignorance on silent issues is from lack of consultation, not a lack of caring. We can know little of what AQC has submitted to Planning NSW all along; will miss some questions.

If Planning can supply answers then, thank you; the elephants in my own room emerge as follows:

One is **the fate of the public road** linking Scone and Muswellbrook along the valley and foothills. The Old Scone Road, variously named along its length. I referred to it as 'essential', but that is a pale description. It is of course the access to any farms and studs which AQC would allow to survive, and to the remaining residences. For me it is my only route south, because my vehicle does not use the highway, and will not be 'upgraded'. It is for many the only, and most beautiful, way to enjoy the valley, obtaining a continuum of delightful views in a relaxing slow drive. **Tourism asset ++.**

OK. this public road is beneath any theoretic Dartbrook open-cut overburden. Planning NSW cannot ignore that, given the evidence: land purchases both open and secret, the CEO's public statements.. that he would be going for more MOD's, that the immense coal-licence would not be given up, and admitting the open-cut in ASX, on website. Also, see the huge land area inside the red line.. it is clearly way beyond the border/pillar zone on the map, and of no practical use to an underground mine. ****Planning must deal with the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing but.**

Also in this zone is the road to the west, **Dorset Road**, leading to residences and farms.

The status of the "West Muswellbrook Project" I cannot find on the Planning website, and I am very loath to find it out, because the thought gives me instant illness. That "project" would of course extend the annihilation of the valley landscape now begun by Mt Pleasant Mine on the far side of the Castle Rock Road. (from which road a world beating view is obtained, still, of the entire Upper Hunter and ranges, from Mount Pleasant's summit.) If a West Muswellbrook open-cut went ahead, annihilating the residences, bushland, waterways and scenery, adding another overburden mountain (I don't believe the tiny hole in the "final void" graphic), then of course Dorset Road would no longer be very useful. ** So is the Dartbrook open-cut just waiting for the Project as precedent?*

The Upper Hunter is then shot. The rural jobs are lost, the tourism future a joke, the stock gone, the homes gone, the social history shattered like the health of the local people. Don't do this.

ACCESS. The red line bounding the AQC site on the photographic plan of the projected Dartbrook workings seems not to correspond with land ownerships. I can't see how it was worked out. As said, it appears to be waiting to enclose overburden, or extension of underground mining. So is this line to be fenced, **blocking off the New England Highway's only alternative public flood/accident detour road?** Or is the boundary to remain an open as it is now, and as it was during the previous longwalling? NB: Other public roads near Aberdeen have already been blocked off (bought, or taken from NSW?); signs and gates went up, and now only special access is allowed.

All for what? Mr Robinson's "return on investment"? (NSW mine royalties could evaporate in one court defence.) There is serious insanity here. For God's sake tell them to buzz off. BA.