



**New South Wales Government**  
**Independent Planning Commission**

**TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

RE: MOUNT PLEASANT OPTIMISATION PROJECT (SSD10418)

**PUBLIC HEARING DAY 1**

COMMISSION PANEL:      PROFESSOR ALICE CLARK (Chair)  
                                 PROFESSOR CHRIS FELL  
                                 TERRY BAILEY

COUNSEL ASSISTING      SCOTT ROBERTSON  
THE COMMISSION:

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PROF. CLARK: Good morning and welcome to day 1 of the Independent Planning Commission's electronic public hearing into the State Significant Development Application for the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project (SSD10418). Before we begin I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which we meet and to the Wonnarua People as the traditional custodians of the land on which the project is located. I'd like to pay my respects to their Elders past, present and those that did not make Elder status and to First Nations People joining us today.

10 I'm Professor Alice Clark, the Chair of the Commission Panel. Joining me are my fellow Commissioners Professor Chris Fell and Terry Bailey. We also have Scott Robertson as Counsel Assisting the Commission at this public hearing. The Minister for Planning has directed the Commission to hold a public hearing into the application. The Commission is the consent authority for this State Significant Development Application because 50 or more public objections were received. I note the Department of Planning and Environment in its assessment report has recommended that the applicant is approvable subject to conditions.

20 This public hearing is online with registered speakers provided the opportunity present to the panel via video conference and telephone. In the interests of openness and transparency are live-streaming the proceedings on the Commission's website. A full transcript of the two-day hearing will also be published on the Commission's website in the next few days. Where we are in this process, this public hearing forms part of the Commission's process. We also have undertaken a site inspection, we've met with the department, the applicant, Muswellbrook Shire Council and Upper Hunter Shire Council. Transcripts of these meetings and site inspection notes have been published on our website. After the public hearing we may meet with relevant stakeholders if clarification or additional information is required on matters raised.

30 The purpose of this hearing is to invite interested individuals and groups to make any submissions that they consider appropriate. The Commission is particularly assisted by submissions that are responsive to the department's assessment report and recommended conditions of consent. All submissions made to the department during the exhibition of the environmental impact statement have been made available to the Commission. As such, today's speakers are encouraged to avoid repeating or restating submissions they've previously made on this application. There are certain matters that, by law, the Commission is not permitted to take into account when making its determination. Submissions on such matters cannot be considered by this panel. These matters include the reputation of the application and any past planning law breaches by the applicant.

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Before we get underway I would like to outline how today's public hearing will run. We will first hear from the department on the findings of its whole-of-government assessment of the application currently before the Commission. We will hear from the applicant second. We will then proceed to hear from our other registered speakers. Counsel Assisting Scott Robertson will introduce each speaker when it's their turn to present to the panel. Everyone has been advised in advance how long they have to speak. A bell will sound when a speaker has one minute remaining. A second bell will sound when the speaker's time has expired. To ensure everyone receives their fair share of time we will enforce the timekeeping rules.

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I reserve right as Chair to allow additional time as required to hear new information. If you have a copy of your presentation or additional material to support your presentation it would be appreciated if you would provide a copy to the Commission. My fellow Commissioners and I may ask you questions regarding your submission as might Mr Robertson; however, the public hearing is primarily a listening exercise for the panel so we can hear what you have to say. If we ask you a question and you're not in a position to answer it today, you are welcome to respond in writing by 5.00pm Australian Eastern Standard Time on Friday, the 15th of July, 2022.

20 Please note, any information given to us may be made public. The Commission's privacy statement governs our approach to managing your information which you can view on our website. Thank you. And it's now time to call our first speaker.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you, Chair. Our first speakers are from the Department of Planning and Environment. Firstly, Mr Clay Preshaw who's the Executive Director of Energy Resources and Industry Assessments at that department and, secondly, Mr Steve O'Donoghue who's the Director of Resource Assessments at that department. Mr Preshaw, please go ahead.

30 **<CLAY PRESHAW & STEVE O'DONOGHUE, DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT**

MR PRESHAW: Thank you, Chair and Counsel. I'd like to acknowledge the assessment of any large scale mining project like this actually involves a lot of people, most of whom are not present today. So as the Executive Director, at the end of the day, I'm really only one of the final sign-offs to the assessment board and I was mostly involved at the key points of the assessment process and also to just thank the Commission for giving us the opportunity to present the project openly in this type of forum. I'll also say now from the outset that we're not intending to outline the project components in any detail as this is all well documented in the substantial documentation available on our website.

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Also for the purposes of this presentation when Steve or I make reference to the project it refers to the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project. Firstly, some comments on our assessment report just to highlight to the Commission as we have in other recent projects before the Commission that there is, you know, fundamentally a difficult task for us in preparing a report. It's important to say our report is not meant to be a full compilation of all the information that's been presented to us throughout the assessment process and all that information is available and can be accessed if necessary.

10

Our assessment report is instead a distillation of all that material and is designed to give the decision-maker, which obviously in this case is the Commission, enough information to make a determination. I will say that we are confident that our report does provide a good summary of our views about the project, so we also believe that this public hearing process can actually be really important in fleshing out key issues about the project from a community's perspective. Just a few comments about our approach to this and other reports which is probably different to those in years gone past. The most important thing is today that we really tried in this report to be open and transparent about any of the issues that have worried us or concerned us about the project. Where possible, we try and avoid overly technical language or excessive details which I believe can actually hide the real issues of concern or at least make them hard to understand.

20

What does that mean for this project? Well, like most mining projects we have grappled with a number of complex technical issues, the types of issues that have forced us to seek additional information and extra advice on a range of experts within and outside of government. In addition to the experts retained by MACH Energy and the experts within the various government agencies the department engaged independent experts in air quality and groundwater to advise us on the project and the project has been reviewed by the Commonwealth's Independent Expert Scientific Committee.

30

Despite these expert reviews the department recognises that most State Significant projects involve competing land uses and they often involve issues that reasonable people might and do disagree about and, in fact, difficult task of weighing up the pros and cons of the project and balancing up these competing views perspectives and also taking into account the public interest more broadly. That is ultimately the statutory task that we are required to do under the Environmental Planning Assessment Act. It is, of course, an extremely difficult task when the consequence is either an approval or a refusal which will undoubtedly be significant but importantly, in the context of all of that technical complexity and significance of consequences we're confident that we've

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provided a considerable amount of evidence to support the conclusions that we've ultimately come to.

So with those general comments out of the way I'll make a few comments about the Mount Pleasant mine. As a brownfields project I thought it would be useful to give some context around the history of the mine and its approvals including the approved disturbance areas and biodiversity offsets as these affect the understanding and assessment of the project. Mount Pleasant was originally approved by the Planning Minister in December 1999 or it was physically commenced at that time; however, the then owner of the mine Coal & Allied which was a Rio Tinto company didn't commence mining operation as it was focusing on other mines in the Hunter Valley.

In 2012, which is some 13 years after the original New South Wales approval, Coal & Allied subsequently obtained further approval for the mine under the Commonwealth EPBC Act and the Commonwealth approval was later buried in June 2020. The Commonwealth approval included some disturbance areas in addition to the disturbance areas under the New South Wales approval and I'll ask my team to bring up a figure that shows these areas. There it is. Essentially a disturbance area under the New South Wales approval includes all these light yellow or beige-coloured areas as well as the hatched area in the north-western part of the project known as the relinquished area.

The Commonwealth approval includes all of these areas as well as the bright yellow-coloured areas with the exception of the Northern Link Road option which we'll come to a bit later. MACH Energy purchased Mount Pleasant from Coal & Allied in 2016 and then commenced mining in the areas approved under the New South Wales approval in 2018. The existing approval allows MACH to extract up to 10 and a half million tonnes per annum of ROM coal until the 22nd of December, 2026 and MACH is now proposing to, you know, optimise mining operations at Mount Pleasant. This optimisation would include extracting an additional 247 million tonnes of ROM coal through infill mining in some of the disturbance areas approved under the Commonwealth approval and by deepening the pits by approximately 85 metres to extract lower coal seams.

The mining areas can be rationalised into three contiguous pits which is down from the four under the existing state approval. The optimised mine would include two out-of-pit emplacements down from the original three. It will also include a single final void down from the three under the existing approval. So the project would increase coal production from 10 and a half to 21 million tonnes per year and would extend the operating life by an additional 22 years to 2048. In terms of disturbance areas the additional disturbance areas, those bright yellow areas, comprise approximately 500

hectares; however, MACH is also proposing to relinquish a similar area of about 500 hectares in the north-western area which would no longer be disturbed. This is the so-called relinquishment area shown as the hatched area on that figure and was previously approved for out-of-pit emplacement.

So that background, I think, provides a bit of context for the consideration of some of the key issues associated with the project but I will now pass it over to Steve to discuss the key issues which include firstly, amenity issues including noise, air quality and visual amenity, particularly given the mine's proximity to Muswellbrook and then  
10 secondly, greenhouse gas emissions and then thirdly, biodiversity.

MR ROBERTSON: Mr Preshaw, just before you do that, I'm sorry to interrupt, the figure that you showed a moment ago, was that figure 3.1 which was on page 19, numbered page 7 of the department's Assessment Report, just so I can ensure that we're all in the same document?

MR PRESRAW: Yes. Yes, it is.

MR O'DONOGHUE: That's correct.  
20

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you. Mr O'Donoghue.

MR O'DONOGHUE: Thanks, Counsel. Thanks, Clay. Good morning, Chair, Commissioners and Counsel. As Clay said, my name's Steve O'Donoghue, Director, Resource Assessments at Department of Planning and Environment. First of all I would like to provide a short summary of the assessment process to date, set out some of the more strategic context of the project that Clay has referred to above, followed by an outline of the key assessment issues, findings and recommendations that the department has made in its assessment report to the Commission.  
30

In addition to the current public hearing process here today the project has been through an extensive process already, it included a public exhibition of the EIS, environmental impact statement, from February to March 2021 with a total of 250 public submissions received on the project. Of these submissions 56 per cent were opposed to the project, while around 42 per cent supported the project and about two per cent providing comment.

The supporting submissions largely noted the positive socioeconomic benefits and ongoing employment opportunities both at the mine and for industry supporting  
40 mining in the region. The key concerns raised in the objecting submissions were largely about amenity issues including air quality, noise and related health impacts,

greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, water resource impacts, visual and land use impacts, social impacts and biodiversity impacts associated with the development. MACH Energy provided a submissions report in July 2021 and has also provided a range of supplementary information since this time to address matters and issues raised by the department and other agencies and also in response to experts who were engaged.

10 All this information is available on the department's website and also referenced and linked into our assessment report for people to look at and the Commission, of course. The department received advice from NSW Government authorities as well throughout the assessment process including the Environment Protection Authority, the department's Water and Biodiversity Conservation and Science Group on biodiversity matters, the Climate and Atmospheric Science Branch within the department in relation to greenhouse gas emissions, the Resources Regulator particularly in relation to rehabilitation and also mining explosion geoscience in terms of the resource.

20 The department also received advice and submissions from Muswellbrook Shire Council and the Upper Hunter Shire Council. In addition to the expertise provided by these government agencies, as Clay mentioned, the department also engaged independent experts in key assessment areas. These include in air quality, Jane Barnett from Zephyr Environmental and on groundwater aspects, Hugh Middlemiss from Hydro Geologic focusing on long term groundwater impacts associated with the final void, in particular. This advice and other government agency advice including, as Clay mentioned, from the Independent Expert Scientific Committee, the Commonwealth one, has been carefully considered and outlined in the department's assessment report.

30 Following this, a request for a public hearing from the Minister for Planning was made in September '21. That was followed by the recent referral of the department's assessment report to the Commission on 31 May. I just want to touch on some strategic context aspects before I focus on some of the assessment issues. It's important to understand some of the strategic context in relation to existing land uses within the surrounding site, in particular. From a land use perspective the Mount Pleasant mine is located in the longstanding mining precinct within the Upper Hunter Valley. There's a number of other coalmines located near the Mount Pleasant mine including the Bengalla open-cut mine immediately to the south, the Dartbrook underground mine located immediately to the north of Mount Pleasant, Mount Arthur and Mangoola open-cut mines to the south and south-west and Muswellbrook open-cut and underground mine to the east. While located in an intensive mining precinct  
40 Mount Pleasant is also in close proximity to urban areas with Muswellbrook located

three kilometres to the south-east and other village of Aberdeen located about five kilometres to the north.

10 Mining at Mount Pleasant has commenced already in the south-east corner of the mine closest to Muswellbrook and it is moving to the north and west away from Muswellbrook. To minimise impacts on urban areas the early years of mining are focusing on the development of eastern face of the eastern out-of-pit emplacement area which when fully developed and rehabilitated would provide a visual and acoustic barrier between the mining operations and the major urban centre around Muswellbrook and rural residential located between there and the mine.

20 It's important to note MACH and other mining companies own much of the land in proximity to the project area, particularly between the mines; however, there are privately-owned rural properties located around the mine generally to the west and east, mostly on broad-acre landholdings, although there is some rural residential pockets also located to the north-east in the Kayuga sort of village area. Also to the east and south-east around Collins Lane, Wybong Road and Racecourse Road areas. As a result, these amenity-related issues are one of the key and important issues for the existing mine and for the project.

From a land use perspective the department has also carefully considered potential impacts on the project on biophysical strategic agricultural land or BSAL, along with important equine and viticulture critical industry clusters located around the project but it is important to note that the project did not trigger the requirement for a gateway certificate as the project is confined within existing mining lease boundary and didn't extend outside that boundary.

30 Just from a strategic point of view as well I wanted to touch on greenhouse gas emissions. It was clearly a primary issue in submissions about greenhouse gas emissions and climate change impacts. The department's assessment carefully considered these impacts in consideration of key international, national and state climate change policies and plans including Australia's nationally-determined contributions committed to under the Paris Agreement, the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Scheme and associated safeguard mechanism and from a New South Wales perspective net zero plan policies and also the stage 1 implementation plan and a more recent update.

40 I'll outline a bit further in the talk about the department's consideration of greenhouse gas emissions as a key assessment issue. Probably from a policy perspective too it's important to note that the - in the strategic context that the NSW Government's 2020 strategic statement on coal exploration and mining in New South Wales recognises the

value of continued coal production to the state including the potential for coal production to deliver significant economic benefits to regional communities. To support the intentions of the statement the NSW Government has identified portions of the state's coal regions where mining is not supported and/or is prohibited and areas considered for proactive release for coal exploration.

10 The project would not be located in any of these no-go or prohibited areas but would be located in an area where coal exploration and mining titles already exist and is an extension of existing mining operations, in this case largely through going to deeper seams rather than extending the mine footprint. As outlined the proposed mining area is suitably located in that it's within an existing mine precinct and more supported by existing industrial facilities, infrastructure and transport corridors. I just wanted to move on to some of the key assessment issues that the department identified in its assessment and as flagged by Clay, these include amenity issues, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity as the key focused areas.

20 Other issues associated with the project such as water resources, blasting, traffic, heritage and social issues, impacts and benefits are also outlined in the department's assessment report and I won't go into detail here today. Firstly, in relation to amenity impacts. As outlined earlier, given that Mount Pleasant is located on the outskirts of Muswellbrook the mine is in proximity to a large number of sensitive receivers and residences. As such, amenity issues including noise, air quality and visual have always been key issues for the mine, for the existing mine but also for the project.

30 At the time of the original approval in 1999 there were 32 privately-owned residences predicted to be within the mine's voluntary acquisition area. This has since reduced somewhat through acquisitions with eight of these receivers now mine-owned or no longer having a dwelling present. With the proposed project there's predicted to be 16 privately-owned residents or land would now trigger voluntary acquisition. Of the 16 receivers, two receivers are affected by noise alone, one by air quality and 13 are predicted to trigger acquisition through both noise and air quality. There's a further 14 receivers - residences within the voluntary mitigation area of the mine, all of which are predicted to be moderately affected by noise.

40 The affected properties are generally located in rural residential areas to the north-east, east and south-east of the mine on the western side of the New England Highway. They're located mainly around Kayuga, Kayuga Road and Racecourse Road areas but also on rural properties scattered around the mine. As I outlined earlier, mining at Mount Pleasant commenced in the south-east corner of the project area closest to the majority of the affected receivers. The mine is now progressing to the north and to the west away from these receivers. A key component of the mine is the development of

the eastern placement between the mine and Muswellbrook which provides noise and visual shielding between the mine and urban areas and that, of course, implements a range of over measures to mitigate noise and air quality emissions. For example, acoustic attenuation of plant as well as real-time predictive and air and noise management systems. These are actions and measures that are currently undertaken with the existing mine and are proposed to be continued as part of the project.

10 They also use - the systems also use meteorological forecasting and monitoring to manage day to day mining operations that allow proactive changes to mine operations if trip triggers are met. With these measures the existing mine generally complies with existing noise and air quality criteria for those receivers outside the acquisition area. With regard to noise, the EIS risk and monitoring reports subsequent indicate compliance with the typical criteria since at least November 2017 with the exception of some small number of exceedances to the east at monitoring stations. Investigations indicated no exceedance of the criteria at privately-owned receivers outside the acquisition area. So the information is showing that MACH is managing its noise and air quality systems and complying with the criteria in general.

20 The project also includes a number of additional mitigation areas to reduce amenity impacts including staging the increase in production. The mine's going up to - almost doubling production rate but it's going to stage the increase in production as mining moves away from Muswellbrook so that increase would come as it moves further from the more populated centre. Increasing the height of the eastern placement area to improve noise and visual shielding and also avoid the need for improved emplacement areas and constructing a noise barrier along the rail spur line and also implement operational measures including relocation of plant during adverse conditions.

30 With these measures, MACH's assessment indicates that noise and dust impacts would reduce in general compared to the approved project and as outlined earlier, there would be a reduction in receivers triggering acquisition rights from 32 down to 16 compared to the approved project and with moderately-affected receivers with mitigation rights would reduce from 20 to 14. A lot of these receivers would move into a negligible impact level where one to two decibels above the project noise levels. These reductions are largely a result of the proposed mitigation measures identified above including also the removal of a previously-approved coal conveyor that was part of the existing project. Importantly, all but three of the affected receivers already have voluntary mitigation or acquisition rights under the existing approval with one residence up on the Kayuga area constructed since the original approval and two residences down more to the south-east along Wybong Road tripping noise mitigation rights.

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So overall the department and in consultation with the EPA are satisfied that MACH has implemented reasonable and feasible mitigation measures for the project and that these measures would generally result in improvement of amenity in the surrounding area compared with the approved mine despite the proposed production increase. We've recommended the inclusion of comprehensive noise and air quality operating conditions within the development consent should it be granted. It's also importantly there is an environmental protection licence that covers the existing operations that would continue and varied if the project were to be approved. It does include additional conditions requiring dust-generating activity at the mine to cease under a specific combination of adverse weather conditions including monitoring undertaken in the Upper Hunter air quality monitoring network and this is probably a fairly unique requirement for the mines in the Hunter Valley that MACH has to comply with.

Probably just the final thing to say on amenity issues is MACH has introduced additional micro leaf design of the eastern placement and removed other emplacement areas including the relinquishment area to the north-west which would improve visual amenity outcomes from that perspective with bringing that micro leaf into the design. I'd just like to move on briefly onto greenhouse gas emissions. A couple of things to note in relation to the project's direct, that is, scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions. Firstly, the project has an average scope 1 and 2 emissions intensity over the life of the project of around 0.04 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per tonne of ROM coal which about half is from fugitive emissions estimated around that 0.02 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per tonne of ROM coal. This is at the lower end of the scale compared to other open-cut mining operations in New South Wales, noting also that the Commonwealth factors in terms of looking at emissions, fugitive emissions from coalmines has a default emission for fugitive emissions from New South Wales mines at 0.06 tonne, around 0.06 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e per tonne of ROM coal. So the estimate for this project are lower than that default emission level.

The lower emissions intensity also reflects the relatively low strip ratios at the mine compared to other mines and the lower cost of production as a result of the existing infrastructure and established mining areas as well as a relatively lower gas content of the coal. In relation to the gas content MACH - and fugitive emissions, it's important for fugitive emissions - MACH through the assessment provided additional information indicating that the gas content is low due to the shallow coal seams and depressurisation from existing mining operations in the area; however, the gas content does increase with depth and I understand MACH has provided more information to the Commission about this and as such, the fugitive emissions do increase over the life of the mine as mining gets deeper and production increases with fugitive emissions peaking, in particular, in the early 2040s.

The department's Climate and Atmospheric Science Branch, in their review also confirmed that the project has been accounted for in the New South Wales greenhouse emissions projections in the department's net zero stage 1 implementation update. The projections used in CASA's net zero emissions modelling for the project are conservatively higher than MACH's projections. CASA did recommend that MACH be required to provide a more detailed consideration of scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas mitigation measures, particularly in relation to diesel consumption and fugitive emissions, particularly around methane content and the potential for methane pre-drainage and beneficial use.

10

As outlined in the department's assessment report MACH did undertake further assessment to investigate mitigation measures including reduction of fugitive emissions by pre-draining. MACH's assessment indicates that pre-draining would not provide any significant benefit given the relatively low existing gas content and saturation of the coal seams. This means that pre-draining would require significant stimulation such as dewatering and fracking to stimulate gas flow. It would also require drainage wells to be developed over the mine would also mean that a significant portion of the gas would remain locked in the coal matrix because of the low gas content irrespective of the pre-draining efforts. For these reasons the additional work done by MACH indicates that pre-draining would not significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the project.

20

The department also recognises that the project's scope 1 and 2 emissions including, inclusive of fugitives represent a very small portion of New South Wales annual greenhouse gas emissions of around 0.5 per cent and that the emissions have been accounted for in the New South Wales net zero plan. The department also notes that the vast majority of greenhouse has emissions associated with the project, some 98 per cent are scope 3 emissions associated with the downstream burning of the coal resource by end users. Under the Paris Agreement accounting rules and Australian legislation scope 3 emissions are not included in the project emission reporting to avoid double-counting.

30

Nonetheless, the department recognises the project is consistent with the objectives of Australian's long-term emission reduction plan and the NSW Government strategic statement on coal exploration and mining. To minimise greenhouse gas emissions and encourage continual improvement to performance, the department has recommended conditions requiring MACH to limit scope 1 fugitive emissions and diesel use emission to no greater than predicted in the assessments. Minimise scope 2 emissions by using renewable and net zero electricity sources. Undertake regular three-yearly reviews to investigate and further reduce these emissions over time and potentially ramp down emissions and look at - review the targets. Implement a greenhouse gas

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monitoring and management plan and offset emissions where performance measures are exceeded.

So overall the department considers that the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the project are relatively modest for a coalmine of this scale and represent a small proportion of Australia's nationally-determined contribution under the Paris Agreement. Look, I might move on, probably running out of time.

10 MR ROBERTSON: Mr O'Donoghue, if that's a convenient point we might just ask you to pause to give the panel an opportunity to ask any immediate questions that it has on what you've said so far or otherwise in relation to your department's assessment report.

MR O'DONOGHUE: Great. Thanks, Counsel.

PROF. FELL: Mr O'Donoghue, just a question about the fugitive methane emissions. So the applicant's information suggests they jump substantially from 2034 onwards as deeper seams are addressed. What's the likelihood of technology being available to ameliorate that situation beyond 2034?

20 MR O'DONOGHUE: I guess that's a decade or more, Commissioner. At this point based on the information we've got, and largely due to the - it's largely driven by the gas content but also the methane concentration, at this point there's limited technology. I think there's a lot of work going on in that space, there's certainly a lot of - there's the coal innovation fund, for example, New South Wales (not transcribable) both at the Commonwealth and state level doing research in that area. So I couldn't give any specific advice as to what's the potential for that research to provide a solution here but there's certainly a lot of research going on in both underground mines in particular where there's more opportunity to collect and  
30 minimise fugitive emissions but some of that research might - will certainly be effective for pre-drainage options for open-cut mines as well.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you. Professor Clark has a question.

PROF. CLARK: Thank you. My question relates to a number of submissions that draw to the uncertainty of future economic projections, and in relation to that I'm noting that the applicant is subject to payment of bonds over a period of timeframes, so if the expansion were to be approved and the mine to close unexpectedly, the question is can you comment on the sufficiency of those bonds to keep that  
40 rehabilitation done should that mine close early to the standards that we've seen in the submission?

MR O'DONOGHUE: The rehabilitation bonds are managed by the Resources Regulator. Their process is quite stringent and there's been a lot of change to that process in the last five years, five to 10 years. Certainly through the rehab management plan process or previously the mine operations plan at any time in the project a rehabilitation bond is worked out so it's regularly updated as to whatever stage the mine is at and it's quite a rigorous process in determining what those costs are to meet the rehabilitation objectives of the mine at any point in time. So I'm quite confident that the processes are there in place to ensure that there's a sufficient  
10 rehabilitation bond to meet the rehab objectives at whatever stage the mine is at.

MR ROBERTSON: Mr O'Donoghue, does that mean that you're saying in your experience the kind of rehabilitation bonds to which you just referred are ordinarily and adequate in your experience or is that not something you can comment upon one way or the other?

MR O'DONOGHUE: That's probably more a - the Resources Regulator can provide advice on that. It's just that there has been a lot of - there's been recent mining reform, you know, done over the - more recently, updates to the mining reg but also  
20 good processes put in place with regular review of what the liability is in terms of rehabilitation but I'm happy - it's probably more - be better for the Resources Regulator to talk about the history around that.

MR ROBERTSON: Are there any further questions from the panel?

PROF. CLARK: Chris.

PROF. FELL: Yes. Mr O'Donoghue, climate change is bringing about quite a few changes in our weather. I wonder if these have been accounted for in future  
30 predictions of both noise and air quality?

MR O'DONOGHUE: Probably - when the noise modelling is done it looks at worse case situations in terms of inversions and gradient winds. If you look at - from a conservative point of view it's driven by night time inversion layers so there's probably from a climate change point of view, it might affect the frequency of it but the approach is quite conservative already in terms of looking at adverse sort of MET conditions and feeding into the noise predictions. From an air point of view, you know, they're looking at representative years in terms of the air quality volume. The key drivers around that will be, you know, wind direction and speed, for example, and  
40 changes in that but happy to take that on notice too, Commissioner, about volume or

advice about factoring in, you know, climate change predictions in that. Keeping in mind that the life of the project in the context of climate change impacts as well.

MR ROBERTSON: Mr O'Donoghue, you just indicated you'll take part of that question on notice. Are you in a position or are you likely to be in a position to provide at least some input in relation to that when you return to the Commission tomorrow? I appreciate there might not be a complete response but at least an initial provisional assistance tomorrow. Are you in a position to do that?

10 MR O'DONOGHUE: That will be fine, yes.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you. Are there any further questions from the panel? Thank you, Mr Preshaw and Mr O'Donoghue, for your assistance. I note that we'll have you back tomorrow for any further questions that the panel has both in relation to the issue that Mr O'Donoghue's taken on notice but also in relation to any other issues that rise during the course of this public hearing. We'll now move to the applicant Mr Chris Lauritzen. Mr Lauritzen, are you there?

MR LAURITZEN: Yes, Counsel, I'm Chris.

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MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead.

**<CHRIS LAURITZEN, MACH ENERGY AUSTRALIA (APPLICANT)**

MR LAURITZEN: Okay. Thank you very much, Commissioners, and Counsel Assisting. I do have a presentation to go through but before I start I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. So hopefully the technology will not defeat me and I'll just share this presentation. Okay. Now, hopefully everybody can see that.

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MR ROBERTSON: Yes, we can see that, Mr Lauritzen, thank you.

MR LAURITZEN: All right. So good morning everybody, my name is Chris Lauritzen and I'm the General Manager for Resource Development at MACH Energy. MACH Energy purchased the Mount Pleasant operation in 2016 and then we rapidly moved to develop the asset and begin coal production. In 2018 we entered a partnership with Japan Coal Development Australia or JCDA which represents a group of major coal consumers in Japan. MACH Energy Australia is the applicant for the proposed Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project on behalf of the joint venture between MACH and JCDA.

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The community and PIC panel members would be aware that there's a comprehensive EIS that describes the project, its potential environmental impacts and MACH's proposed continuation and extension of associated environment management measures. Today I'll give a necessarily brief introduction to the project and explain why it's a consolidation and optimisation of the existing approved Mount Pleasant operation. So the Mount Pleasant operation is located west of Muswellbrook near the junction of the Muswellbrook inland railway line and the main northern railway. The project's located approximately three kilometres north-west of Muswellbrook and give  
10 kilometres south-south-west of Aberdeen. The site's also around 18 kilometres from Denman, 17 kilometres from Scone and 50 kilometres from Singleton. The area's a mining precinct and the project is largely surrounded by neighbouring mines and mining tenements.

MACH has its own rail spur and rail loop and exports coal from both major Newcastle port facilities, primarily to Asian customers including Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Much of the land outside of Muswellbrook is mine-owned; however, a number of private rural residences located in close proximity to the approved mine have acquisition or mitigation upon request rights under the existing approval. These are  
20 primarily located in close proximity to the east, north-east and south-west. Mount Arthur and Bengalla, our neighbouring mines, own the majority of land south of the project. Mangoola and Muswellbrook Coal own land to the west and Dartbrook-owned land is located between the site and Aberdeen in the north and MACH Energy also owns land east and west of the project.

The Mount Pleasant operation was approved in 1999 but was not developed as an operational mine at that time. The original approval incorporated multiple open-cut pits, three out of pit waste rock emplacements and multiple final voids. Since MACH Energy acquired the asset mining has commenced in the south-east corner and  
30 progressed north and westwards and currently remains south of Castlerock Road which bisects the site. So in general terms the mine is developing northwards in the short term and then will progress to the west over the life of the mine.

So the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project is so named because it's effectively a consolidation and optimisation of the current approved mine. Project mining is more focused between the existing infrastructure area and the existent mining area and we would relinquish a large approved area in the north-west which is shown in hatching to facilitate project in-fill areas shown in yellow without increasing total site land disturbance. The relinquishment area has higher habitat values than the project in-fill  
40 areas which would result in a net positive biodiversity outcome. A higher single waste rock emplacement would reduce the number of out-of-pit emplacements required.

The project additional infrastructure would integrate with the extensive existing infrastructure at the mine. The project maximises the use of the existing fines emplacement and the new CHPP modules would incorporate fine reject dewatering. The proposed project life to 2048 would provide certainty for MACH, our suppliers, our customers, the community and our workforce. The approved Western Link Road is not required and the approved Northern Link Road would be realigned. With respect to heritage values the relinquishment area has a greater concentration of recorded Aboriginal cultural heritage sites than the proposed project open-cut in-fill areas as can be seen in this figure.

The project's impacts on historical heritage items would be effectively unchanged from the approved mine as the local significance heritage items to be disturbed are also located within the footprint of the approved mine. MACH would develop and implement historical heritage and Aboriginal cultural heritage management plans to manage the impacts of the project on local heritage values consistent with the department's recommended consent conditions.

So a major design objective for the project was to minimise any increase to the existing approved envelope for air quality and noise emissions. A key project management measure for both air quality and noise emissions to target that design objective is the proposed staging of project major production increases. This staging involves a doubling of project ROM coal production over a period of approximately a decade. Along with many other noise and air quality mitigation measures and the progressive development of the Eastern Emplacement, this staging would gradually ramp up production as the mine moves to the west. This staging would enable an increase in project coal production while minimising amenity impacts to the local community. We've also heard in recent weeks that BHP's Mount Arthur mine would seek a four-year extension and close in 2030. So therefore BHP's closure of Mount Arthur mine would also occur prior to the project reaching its proposed peak coal production from 2034.

So these two slides illustrate the complex and varying nature of the project geomorphic landform and the proposed revegetation and future land use. The project final landform has been designed with both macro and micro relief to provide topographic variation and visually integrate with existing landforms. Landform design, which is based on the geomorphology of natural drainage lines, improves not only the site's visual appearance but also the long-term stability of the landform. The majority of the project landform would be revegetated to native vegetation over the life of the project. From the outset of mining operations, MACH has recognised the importance of the landform design and progressive rehabilitation to minimise visual

impacts on Muswellbrook and other receivers. Our Modification 3 involved the development of a more complex emplacement toe and facilitated the more natural looking mine landform features evident on this photograph. The Mount Pleasant operation places waste rock in smaller lifts, and these lifts are designed to minimise the amount of dozer reshaping. This method means the operation can rapidly form the complex geomorphic features and progressively top soil and seed new areas as they become available to reduce amenity impacts.

10 So these two photographs illustrate the results of MACH's focus on landform design and progressive rehabilitation between late 2019 and late 2021, when viewed from Muswellbrook. These two photographs also show that the existing approved mine landform is progressively obscuring the western horizon for some local receivers as the approved Eastern Emplacement landform rises in elevation over time. And these photographs are on the intersection of St Heliers and Sowerby Streets in Muswellbrook township. These two visual simulations illustrate the outcome of the project revegetation of the geomorphic landform on views from Muswellbrook, and as you can see, the geomorphic complexity and revegetation results in a mine landform that would closely resemble the nature of distant natural vegetated landforms with similar topographic variation and form. So the top photo in the picture is the 2034  
20 intermediate landform, and the lower photo is the final landform post-closure with the woodland revegetated.

The purchase and initial establishment of the Mount Pleasant operation was an investment of approximately AU\$1 billion. MACH Energy utilises principal contractors Thiess and Sedgman to conduct mining and coal processing operations at the mine. The operation currently employs approximately 440 people, inclusive of MACH employees and contractors. The mine's now operating at full approved capacity, and MACH and its key contractors have a strong local procurement focus. The mine makes significant operational expenditure in Muswellbrook Shire, the  
30 Hunter Region and New South Wales. The Mount Pleasant operation also contributes to an Aboriginal community development fund that's been operating since 2006. The operation has contributed approximately \$200 million in royalties to the state of New South Wales so far.

In developing this project, MACH has consulted with local people and local community groups. The staging of the project production increases is designed to minimise potential amenity impacts on the local community. However, MACH also recognises that coalmining developments in the Hunter Valley tend to trigger quite diverging views in the community, including strong opposition from those groups that  
40 are philosophically opposed to the industry. This slide is a diagram from our submissions report on the geographic distribution of both positive and negative public

submissions received by DPE on the project environmental impact statement. A large proportion of the public objections received by DPE were from elsewhere in New South Wales or from the Upper Hunter Local Government Area. There was a dichotomy between the towns of Muswellbrook and Singleton, where there were more supporters, and the village of Aberdeen and the town of Scone, where there were more objectors. We feel that the strong support that we have seen from the local community, and particularly from Muswellbrook, reflects the focus that we have put on amenity and early rehabilitation on this site. In terms of investment, employment and contributions, the project will require an additional \$950 million in capital expenditure and would have an average of 600 full-time equivalent employees. Multiple construction phases would also occur with additional workforce demands. The project is estimated to contribute some \$2 billion in royalties to New South Wales or \$684 million on a present value basis. The applicable state and Commonwealth taxes and voluntary planning agreement payments to Muswellbrook Shire Council and Upper Hunter Shire Council would be made, and MACH would also make continued contributions to and sponsorships of community organisations.

The Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project is so named because it's a brownfield project that effectively consolidates and optimises the current approved mine. Our decision to relinquish a large, approved disturbance area in the north-west and our focus on geomorphic landform design and rapid rehabilitation would allow us to consolidate the project within our current mining tenements while minimising potential impacts on biodiversity and local amenity. The project's staged production expansion would occur as other regional mines progressively deplete their economic reserves. For example, our project would not reach peak ROM coal production until after the nearby Mount Arthur coalmine is proposed to close. Should the optimisation project be determined positively, the proposed extension to 2048 would provide certainty for MACH, our suppliers, our customers, the community and our workforce.

So, thank you, Commissioners and Counsel Assisting. That brings me to the close of my project introduction and I'm happy to take any further questions you may have.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you for that, Mr Lauritzen. Mr Bailey I think has the first question from the panel.

MR BAILEY: Thank you, Mr Lauritzen. I just wanted to come back to rehabilitation and note through the submissions there a number of positives and a number of concerns that arise. So what do you say to the concerns regarding the risk of rehabilitation legacy issues arising during or beyond the life of the proposed project, particularly in relation to fluctuations in commodity prices?

MR LAURITZEN: Well, I guess that's, that's the subject of our view on the investment as a whole. We've, we've made that \$1 billion and we'll be proposing to effectively invest another billion dollars. So as a company we are confident that we can, that Mount Pleasant will be a going concern into the future to 2048, and, and furthermore that we'd be able to meet our obligations. You know, the important thing, I guess, is that we are rehabilitating the land on an ongoing basis as we mine, and also it is the NSW Government that determines how our rehabilitation bonding is structured. There's a, there's a rehabilitation cost estimate tool that the, the department creates. We don't, we, we use that tool and we ensure that our, that our bonding is in place in order to, to meet, to comply with that requirement. So in the very unlikely event that MACH Energy was unable, was, was not a going concern, the, the bond would fully cover the entire, the rehabilitation of the entire site.

MR ROBERTSON: Mr Lauritzen, can you just assist the panel in terms of that rehabilitation process. You said in your presentation that the rehabilitation would take place over the life of the project and I think you just described that rehabilitation as being progressive but are you able to assist as to what that's likely to mean in a practical sense? Is that ongoing on a year-to-year basis or is it more likely to be focused towards the ends of the project or is it some combination in between or perhaps is it something else?

MR LAURITZEN: Well, it is the way that mines progress is that as we build the Eastern Emplacement, we would be rehabilitating that with the geomorphic landform design. So the spoil material is in place and I guess it's also a focus - one of our focuses is that we get the spoil dump lifts to the final position as quickly as we can and we actually advance those spoil dump lifts in smaller 10 metre increments rather than big 20 metre tiered sack spoil and the drivers to do that are - you know, there are a number of drivers obviously, it's actually more beneficial and more economic to get that landform to final and get it rehabilitated.

Once you get rehabilitation in place, you know, you've got less dust generation from bare spoil but also, you know, it basically minimises the ratio of disturbed versus rehab that we've got so it reduces our disturbed ground footprint and reduces our dust generation and as you know - as you may be aware we have very stringent controls in place to control our air quality impact so the more rehab we do the more - I guess, the more we're able to comply and reduce our dust generation.

So the process happens in tandem with a mine advance. So as the mine advance the rehabilitation advances. At the very end of the mine there is - you know, we basically have to, you know, push the walls down and rehabilitate and set up the rehabilitation around the final void and I guess in terms of the ratio between that effort and the

ongoing effort, you know, I couldn't comment on that ratio but rehabilitation is an going process.

MR ROBERTSON: I think Professor Fell has a question. Thank you, Professor Fell.

PROF. FELL: Thank you. Mr Lauritzen, thank you for your presentation. Just a question, has MACH any experience of pre-mining scene drainage to reduce future fugitive methane emissions?

- 10 MR LAURITZEN: In my previous life I managed a pilot project for another company to look at that particular question so I can give you some preliminary comments, but I am not a coal-in-methane expert but I have some knowledge that I can offer. I think what we might do is give you some more detailed information on that later but for now I'll just try and answer the question in a preliminary basis if I can. So in terms of the gas contents and composition that occurs in the Mount Pleasant mine I guess it is quite low even by open-cut standards and that's driven primarily by the fact that the Mount Pleasant open-cut is quite shallow, it's about - I think about 270 metres at its deepest extent and typically at Mount Pleasant we have a very low gas zone in the first hundred metres of less than one cubic metre per tonne and a lot of that gas is carbon  
20 dioxide.

As you go deeper down to 200 metres the percentage of methane increases to around about three cubic metres per tonne at a depth of 225 metres, I think it is, and so below 225 just in that sliver of the geology between 225 metres and the base of the pit at 275 there is a zone where the coal seams have gas contents around - up to - you know, from three to four cubic metres per tonne and that gas content is generally all methane. So if you were to try and target - do pre-drainage on that particular zone which I guess is the highest gas zone, you would face a number of key technical difficulties.

- 30 First of all, the amount of gas - I guess the pressure within the seam itself, the ability to get that gas to migrate to say some sort of drainage well would be hampered by the fact that it's at quite a low pressure and you're very likely to get a higher abandonment pressure. In other words, that's the gas that would remain behind after you'd made the effort to put drainage in. So you would probably have to very intensively stimulate with hydrofracking to get the gas to flow and I guess, you know, being able to get a significant proportion of that gas to justify the very high cost and effort that would be required in pre-drainage wells.

- 40 I don't think it's technically feasible at this point in time. Whether it's technically feasible in the future or not, I guess as technology evolves perhaps it might be. When you look at gas drainage practice within the coal industry you're typically talking

about gas contents in the 10 cubic metre per tonne range, you know, that's what a lot of undergrounds have, you know, that's, you know, more than double, almost three times the gas contents that we've got at our highest levels. So that gives you an idea from - I guess, on the order of magnitude that you're dealing with trying to make gas drainage technology work in these very low contents.

MR ROBERTSON: Any further questions from the panel? Thank you very much, Mr Lauritzen, for your assistance. I note that we've got you back tomorrow for any further questions from the panel arising out of the public hearing. Our next speaker is  
10 Mr Clayton from the Blackroo Community Indigenous Corporation. Mr Clayton, can you hear me?

MR CLAYTON: Yes, I can. Can you hear me? Can you hear me?

MR ROBERTSON: Mr Clayton, can you hear me?

MR CLAYTON: Yes, I can hear you. I'll just try and fix this up.

MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead with your submissions when you're ready.  
20

MR CLAYTON: Can you hear me now?

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, we can hear you loud and clear. Please go ahead. You've got five minutes allocated.

**<JOE CLAYTON, BLACKROO COMMUNITY INDIGENOUS CORPORATION**

MR CLAYTON: Thanks very much. Yeah, my name is Joe Clayton, I'm the  
30 Managing Director of Blackroo Community Indigenous Corporation, it's a local registered charity certified by the Australian Charities and Not For Profit Commission that is working with Indigenous inmates incarcerated in New South Wales correction centres and the underprivileged of the Upper Hunter. I just want to give you some context of where we're coming from. The last Christmas Blackroo ran a food and toy (not transcribable) and gave out 340 Christmas presents to the underprivileged children and adults in the Muswellbrook area. That group also runs a disability disco, helps with the rehousing of victims of domestic violence and puts on quarterly dinners for people in need.

40 Blackroo has also employed 20 inmates on a 38-hour week in Balund-a Correctional Centre in Northern Rivers of New South Wales. The inmates work for Blackroo two

days a week fabricating demountable housing, two days in a TAFE Cert II Pathways to Construction Certificate and one day a week on self-development through the Corrective Services but we pay them for the whole five. The program has now graduated four inmates and Blackroo placed them in work with Blackrock Industries, a local Indigenous mining contractor associated with Blackroo. They will be working for Blackrock on site at Mount Pleasant.

Blackroo also works with Indigenous inmates at John Marony Correctional Centre near Penrith to fabricate traffic management equipment under licence to Fulton Hogan. Through this the inmates learn fabrication skills to assist in finding work post-incarceration. Blackroo has also fabricated box trailers in the Muswellbrook industrial area with the use of day release inmates from St Heliers Correction Centre near Muswellbrook and we're contracted to Kennards Hire for those. The Indigenous make up 38 per cent of the New South Wales corrections incarcerated population while Indigenous in New South Wales general population is only three per cent. Also Indigenous recidivism runs at 88 per cent in New South Wales.

Blackroo's mission is to give the Indigenous inmates a hand-up through education and gaining industrial skills to improve opportunities for employment post-incarceration while also assisting the underprivileged in the Upper Hunter. MACH Energy and Mount Pleasant mine have been extremely financially supportive of Blackroo. Without MACH Energy we would not be operating. MACH Energy are the epitome of a good corporate citizen by supporting many organisations in need in the Upper Hunter. In a past role, I was a project director with Centennial Coal when we gained state and federal approval for the Anvil Hill project. It is now called Mangoola Coal Mine. My work background allows me the insight to make these statements about MACH Energy. Richard Bailey, General Manager of Operations of Mount Pleasant, has had a long association with the project even prior to MACH Energy taking control. Richard is a highly respected member of the local community. Richard is not someone brought in to run roughshod over the community. He is a local and has demonstrated that the mine is in good capable hands under Richard's watch.

MACH Energy (not transcribable) process to this point in the assessment process. The company has consulted widely with community organisations and regulators. They've prepared a comprehensive environmental impact statement to address and reduce impacts such as noise, air quality, biodiversity, Aboriginal heritage, cultural heritage, greenhouse gas, water and social impacts. The publicly displayed environmental impact statement, which has been assessed by the government agencies and a number of experts, carefully considered and responded to submissions from the government organisations and the public and worked with the DPE to develop operating conditions that are considered and comprehensive. I recommend the DPE's recommendation

should be followed and the project should be approved by the IPC. The future of Mount Pleasant will have a significantly positive impact on the Muswellbrook community, the broader Hunter Region, and in particular will have a significant impact on lowering Indigenous incarceration rates through supporting Blackroo Community Indigenous Corporation. Thanks very much.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much, Mr Clayton, for that assistance. I don't think there's any questions from the panel. I'll then ask Gail Martin of Blackrock Industries to speak for her five minutes. Are you there, Ms Martin?

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MS MARTIN: Yes, I'm there. Can you hear me?

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, we can. Please go ahead.

**<GAIL MARTIN, BLACKROCK INDUSTRIES**

MS MARTIN: Okay. Good morning. My name is Gail Martin. I am the Chief Administration Officer for Blackrock Industries. I've been employed with Blackrock now for almost three years. One of our larger clients is actually Mount Pleasant Operations, MACH itself, as well as other entities there which are including Sedgman, Ditchfield, you know, and several other clients there. We are a labour hire organisation and we work as an Indigenous-owned operation with getting several clients into the workforce as well as retaining, you know, experienced operators and trying to fill gaps where we can with various different things. Further to that, my husband and I own our own company, TGM Enterprises, which is a hospitality and hygiene supply company with an entertainment arm as well, and we've actually also had dealings with the Mount Pleasant coalmine with regards to things like the Cultural Spectacular, and we've always had pleasant dealings with Mount Pleasant. We've never had any issues. They have a lot to do with the community. We've currently got the Blackroo BBQ Trailer housed here at Blackrock Industries that, you know, was only made possible because of Mount Pleasant and Ngaire and her tireless work with the rest of the community. And I know for us as an organisation, for Blackrock as an organisation, we wouldn't be able to keep so many people employed as we currently are without Mount Pleasant. And I think especially with Mount Arthur shutting down, if Mount Pleasant weren't to expand or weren't to continue, that would have a devastating impact on not only Muswellbrook but the surrounding communities, Singleton, Scone, Aberdeen. You know, we draw resources from any number of those areas.

40 And I think from an employment standpoint, you know, Mount Pleasant is fantastic but not only that, with the other things that are happening in the region, I don't think it

would really make sense not to be aware of the positive impact that they've actually got on the community, not just with large labour hire companies like Blackrock, but as I said, smaller companies like myself, we run TGM, you know, and we supply mostly, you know, hotels, motels, pubs, clubs, schools, all of which are actually, you know, going great guns at the moment because of the mining operations and the trade that those companies bring in. So, yeah, I, I actually fully support Mt Pleasant and I think they do fantastic things for the community as a whole across a number of fronts. So, yeah, I, I think they're great.

- 10 MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much for your assistance, Ms Martin. I don't think the panel has any further questions of you. That's the end of the program of speakers, Commissioners, for this morning's session. I propose to ask the next speaker to speak at about 10.55am. But in the meantime, I propose that we take the morning break.

#### **SHORT ADJOURNMENT**

**[10.15am]**

MR ROBERTSON: Commissioners, the next speaker is Jan Davis of the Hunter Environment Lobby. Ms Davis, can you hear us?

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MS DAVIS: Yes, I can.

MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead.

#### **<JAN DAVIS, HUNTER ENVIRONMENT LOBBY**

- MS DAVIS: Thank you very much. Thank you. Thanks, Commissioners. I'd like to acknowledge I'm on the stolen land of the Wonnarua and I'd like to acknowledge their culture past, present and emerging. So Hunter Environment Lobby of HEL, H-E-L, is a regional community-based environmental organisation that's been active for well over 20 years on the issues of environmental degradation, species and habitat loss, the importance of biodiversity and the challenges of climate change. We will include the broad range of agencies for which we've been chosen to represent regional environmental concerns in our written submission to the Commissioners. Thank you.
- 30

- As we said at the previous IPC for Mount Pleasant on the 4th of July in 2018 HEL has had a long interest in the environmental health of the Hunter River system and is of the opinion that water quality is a significant issue for river health in the Hunter region. HEL is concerned that the large mine expansions to the west of the Hunter River, particularly within the Goulburn River tributary and in the upper sector will place additional pressures on the river system and cause further degradation. It is estimated
- 40

32 million litres will be lost initially from the Hunter River every year. The groundwater impact assessment estimates the cumulative drawdown up to 10 metres near Kayuga.

10 The long term reduction from base flow into the rivers is predicted to be 40 megalitres per year. This loss when added to the already large cumulative impact of alluvial drawdown from surrounding mines in the Muswellbrook area is a significant issue that is not being adequately assessed through the assessment process. The long term drawdown of groundwater into final voids across the Upper Hunter has not been assessed for impacts on the Hunter River in regard to climate change. Predictions of lower rainfall runoff, higher evaporation rates and possible lower inflows to Glenbawn Dam. This will impact all water users including mine water licences. The ongoing loss of base flows from the Hunter River is a significant issue.

20 Mount Pleasant is approved to until 2026. The new optimisation project will double the rate of production to 21 million tonnes per year, remove the Western Emplacement, increase depth of mining in the north near Dartbrook, near the Dartbrook water source and increase the height of eastern overburden and extend the life of the mine to 2048. The mine was originally approved in 1999 and sold 18 years later underdeveloped to MACH Energy, now in association with Japanese Coal. In 2016 there was a modification, Mod 3, to get a five-year extension so that the consent didn't lapse. This extension ends in 2026. MACH is now seeking another 22 years of mining via the EIS process.

30 We regard this request for this proposal to be in the realms of the fanciful. To expect to be mining coal in these volumes in 22 years with the steady flow of coal-powered energy to renewables more than doubling every year. If we examine the figures we see that 29 per cent of world energy was produced by renewables in 2020. It is forecast that in less than nine years we'll be producing more than 45 per cent by those methods according to Renew Economy. When we examine the key focus for all major impacts we find that cumulative impacts are the key which must be outlined. The Upper Hunter and our earth are already experiencing serious cumulative impacts and further intensification of mining is not acceptable.

40 Impacts by air pollution. This mine is north-west and directly upwind of Muswellbrook and only a few kilometres away. The prevailing winds is from the north-west. Muswellbrook already experiences air quality that does not meet national standards and air pollution is the most obvious and serious health impact experienced and recognised in town. Doubling production until 2048 can be expected to seriously exacerbate this problem. Doctors for the environment have opposed all major expansions and developments of new coalmines here in the Hunter for many years.

That is because they see the life-shortening effects and asthma complaints of small children who are in this toxic air shed.

Impacts on groundwater. As stated earlier, there is estimated 32 million litres will be lost initially from the Hunter River every year and the long term reduction from base flow into the rivers is predicted to be 40 megalitres per year. This may seem like a small amount but is ongoing forever. The water, instead of flowing down the river, will drain into the mine and, after closure, into the final void. There it will continue to evaporate, concentrating dissolving salts forever. Also in the context of climate change, this may be a significant long-term loss of volume no longer available to irrigation or the environment.

Visual impacts. It has been pointed that by eliminating the Western Emplacement there will be a much higher, unnatural-looking final landform close to the river with a large basin facing the final void to the west. The eastern spoil pile would be approximately as high as Mount Pleasant itself in places and would be visible from Scone. Breaking through the east-west ridge of Castlerock Road significantly impacts the visual amenity of people in Aberdeen.

Social impact. The deterioration of air quality and destruction of views is likely the cause of depressed house prices in Muswellbrook. Also there are 30 privately owned rural residences or parcels of land with the right to acquisition upon request. The social impact assessment acknowledges the flow-on impact of depopulating small communities on the social fabric, mental health, rural fire service, et cetera, of the remnant population. HEL has always objected to proposals which include final voids. We regard them as a cost-cutting exercise, and that if the proposals they follow are worth the expensive development, we regard them worthy of finishing according to ecologically sustainable solutions. The proposed final void will be three kilometres by half a kilometre. Yet another of these salty toxic lakes as a by-product of incomplete rehabilitation is just unacceptable. Rather than have an overburden mountain, the site should be properly remediated along sustainable lines.

HEL always notes that biodiversity is ignored in all coalmining proposals we have commented on, and this one is no exception. Australian woodland ecosystems are collapsing. The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative identified the Upper Hunter as a bottleneck in continuous habitat migration opportunity for species, plant, animal, fungi and microorganisms as habit changes resulting from climate change. The mine site includes two threatened fauna species, the striped legless lizard and the squirrel glider, as well as the tiger orchid, which belongs to the endangered Hunter population. The threatened ecological community under the EPBC Act consists of three plant community types, grey box and white box grassy woodland, forest red gum grassy

open forest, and white box narrow narrow-leaved ironbark, and Blakely's red gum are all found on the site.

We note that the Upper Hunter generally has an economic strategy that focuses on agriculture and tourism. Muswellbrook needs investment in economic diversification, and further entrenchment of mining obstructs this investment. Climate impacts for this proposal are immense. It is not merely an extension in time of an already approved mining. MACH Energy is now proposing extraction of approximately 247 million tonnes of additional run-of-mine coal. The estimated greenhouse gas  
10 emissions over the life of the mine, if this goes ahead, are 860 million tonnes. In conclusion, HEL considers we are already in a climate emergency situation. This proposal will add to the already dire consequences we are working to avoid. The total emissions from this one project amount to 0.2 per cent or 1/500<sup>th</sup> of the world's remaining carbon budget. If warming is to be limited to an already dangerous 1.5 degrees C, so we must keep that under that. These conclusions are totally unacceptable in today's world. We are quickly using up our budget of carbon dioxide, which will cause unanswerable consequences to the climate we depend on to have stability, grow crops, survive and prosper into the future. Your deliberations on the planet - your deliberations will impact our planet so please take them seriously. Thank  
20 you very much.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much, Ms Davis, for your assistance. The next speaker is Beverley Atkinson. Ms Atkinson, can you hear us? Are you there, Ms Atkinson?

MS ATKINSON: Hello?

MR ROBERTSON: Hello. We can hear you. Please go ahead. You've got 15  
30 minutes.

MS ATKINSON: Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: And I'll let you know, we can see the slide show that you've provided to the Commission so please go ahead when you're ready.

**<BEVERLEY ATKINSON, SCONE RESIDENT**

MS ATKINSON: Thank you. I'm Beverley Atkinson, an architect since 1970s, living  
40 in Scone and respecting Wonnarua land. I worked on visual impact and design for transport infrastructure in England. I'm into how this looks, the visual impact of the waste dump, also its broadcasting interference. An EIS will study measurable impacts

like noise and dust. They make a lot of data and actual suffering can get lost in the quantity of it. This EIS is over half a metre thick and visual impact photos are mostly at the back. Visible changes don't give much data, but of all impacts they are the most solid and permanent in people's lives. They are unique to any project, very bad in this one, but MACH's report wasn't so worried. The department's final report cross-references MACH so much that I wondered its submissions were a serious factor. So it is that an overwhelming site permanently affecting the Hunter Valley's morale, its heart, future and memories is dealt with at a company and government level by omission and silence. Result is there's little public response. Not many were at

10 MACH's show-and-tell sessions. The miners themselves weren't given information booklets showing them realities of their possible work. One major servicing company pushed all workers to support this vast extension with just, I quote, "five minutes of their time". Reports have expressed actual reliance on people gradually forgetting the views they used to see as children. I found errors favouring the project in most of the photo montages but not reflected in reports.

The department's finding is visual simulations provide clear understanding of the nature of potential visual impact. With 20 years to wake up, this mine still intends to clumsily break through the only dividing east-west ridge in the Hunter Valley. At the

20 southern edge, it separates our upper valley from the mine fields. Mount Pleasant sits midway on the ridge, which slopes up to the escarpment. So the clumsy breakthrough makes this a greenfield mine in its north aspect. We face new open-cut coal, always rejected by our shire. Three towns are affected. Facing Muswellbrook, it doubles in length, quadrupling the whole and topping at three times the height of the edge we see now. But the department's two photos, 2019 and '21, from MACH, show mainly how the dump can turn green on one edge. It's grown since. The town's lost more horizon. Thanks be for its spirit, culture and music because it has little countryside left. The precious distant views are gone. The sunset's getting earlier all the time. Its people have been solidly groomed into dependence for years by Coalface magazine plus

30 corporate high school invasions, primary school mine tours and small donations for community, yet few could agree with MACH's report saying, "Since everything looks so bad now, more impact simply won't matter."

The department agrees, though, and also with the finding that from where the most visible project components are now seen, the impact would remain high, reducing over time. I'd like to have seen future views taken from the flyover, from North Muswellbrook, Lower Aberdeen, Dartbrook and especially Kayuga. Some Muswellbrook friends living near the dumps west and south are disgusted and they fear worse to come but they can't say so to many people. That is unacceptable social

40 division. Both company and government surely know the truth, that the vast mounds will rise and rise, that no greening or curving of landscaping will remove

claustrophobic blight, nor retrieve the lost horizons for Muswellbrook. A 33-storey building planned on the town edge would cause mayhem in council's planning department, so why no reaction to the mass of this project, equating to around 30,000 such buildings, up to 66 storeys high, jammed together and filled with rocks? It's as high as the nearby Barrington foothills and would rise centrally in the mouth of the Upper Hunter Valley. Our own paid Department of Planning, Industry and Environment sums this up overall as moderate impact.

10 Just a word on rehabilitation. Mr Lauritzen mentioned to me that five more years would be required after 2048. He might have to comment on that.

Aberdeen town would directly face the new cliff, a slice into the throat of Mount Pleasant itself. The exposed cut won't become green, and every sunrise would display the open wound. Aberdeen's distant mountain views are vanishing already. The two reports admit, and I quote, "Some further reduction in views to surrounding hills and mountains on the horizon line from some locations due to increased elevation of the integrated waste rock emplacement landform." Cash gifts to Upper Hunter Shire, maybe for Aberdeen potholes, won't counter the damage to property values, health and landscape. Aberdeen's glory is the beauty of its views and far horizon.

20 For the town of Scone, the department just says, "The mine is not highly visible due to its 17-kilometre distance." In fact, much of the dump would be seen in Scone. It rises to 200 metres over the river flat. The whole point of a country view is the distant horizon. We can see single trees on the Castle Rock ridge, if air pollution allows. We see mountains 45 kilometres away. Our view would lose most of Mount Arthur, Ogilvie Hill and the National Park. Our only screen against the impacts of mining would be torn out forever.

30 I question the report's notion too that impacts are only significant if seen from towns. Locals and visitors want to see our countryside from outdoors, all around. I think the contextual analysis is weak for this project, given its critical position. It spreads visual disaster right up against the major town, while bursting through the beautiful and untouched valley famous for and reliant upon tourism and rural specialties. Cradled in the foothills, ranges and escarpment, the equine, dairy and farming activities need the beauty of the place to stay intact, if tourists are to keep squeezing past the minefields to visit us.

40 The Castle Rock ridge is a line drawn by nature. It carries an ancient and sacred path up to high ground. It is our nearest drive to a look out, with a view over the whole north valley, three towns and distant ranges to the north. Even as a tourism dollar

asset, it's been left unexplored. Sad, since it offers release and joy, especially to people of Muswellbrook, a retreat from life inside a ring of coal dumps.

I've considered the position of Rossgole, its main national broadcasting towers for the Upper Hunter, drew a section to find that the waste dump blocks the sight lines between the towers and the whole of Muswellbrook town. MACH was asked about this by council and it followed up for the department, admitting, and I abbreviate, "The rising landform would begin to obscure the line of sight between towers and residential areas of Muswellbrook. It would go 10 metres above the line of sight at Sydney Street by 2076. The project rising past MOD 3 approval would exacerbate transmission signal effect. At 2031, 23 metres will be above line of sight. MACH anticipates measurable terrain transmission effects, and would accept consent conditions requiring provisions like raising a tower or building additional transmission station."

But it wants another 17 years after 2031, reaching almost as high as Mount Pleasant itself, and 40 metres higher than allowed by the 1999 approval. MACH didn't tell the public about the interference, neither did council, nor the department. Surveys were not taken of the 14,000 people about to lose free-to-air reception. The project was not altered in response. The department offers only a consent condition, A28, I quote, "Should the increased elevation of the development's waste rock emplacement result in adverse impacts on the reception of broadcasting services from the Rossgole tower transmission facilities, the applicant must implement make-good provisions to the satisfaction of the Planning Secretary, such as raising the existing tower or construction of a retransmission station which would meet the sighting and technical requirements of the Australian Communications and Media Authority."

But the ACMA told me last year that it had no protocol to deal with such a precedent, had never come across such a thing before. Telco authorities said similar. Must we then lift the game of national authorities just so that they can approve the obstruction of services they oversee to assist foreign profits?

The dump heights are getting critical already, and below CBD would lose clear reception first. Consent A28 can't work. Raising an existing tower seems pointless, since MACH's new mountain range is right up against Muswellbrook. Siting a retransmission station involves all the TV and radio broadcasts and users, who I'm told are owner-operators. They, and MACH's shareholders too, will want information and answers.

If this vast expansion can't afford its shape change or a delay in process, can it afford a yet unknown method of restoring a major public amenity which it intends to

unnecessarily disable? Any cost should be on MACH's project, not on our taxpayers. The affected townspeople would need compensation. Muswellbrook is already tired of reception problems, accidental and mysterious, in a constantly swelling landscape.

MACH leans on the 1999 approval. But given this original mistake, added to climate change demands, and the altered context, is it even valid? People are refusing to believe their own public authorities would actually let their reception be cut, so there's another impact effectively being dealt with by silence.

- 10 So I see two impacts unique to this project - the greenfield breakout and the broadcasting impact. But there's another applying to all projects - the jobs mantra, used to get approval, whatever the problems. What I see is that new coal jobs wipe out other jobs. A good example next door, the Dartbrook application. We are promised useful royalties if we blindly continue the first transition - that is, to coal and away from the functional background economy.

- But in the Hunter, we see school funding cuts and a big skills shortage. I asked the MACH manager about his new truckdrivers, what work, background and training they left behind and can return to. He didn't know, nor does government ask him. ANU  
20 tells me those statistics are not gathered by Sydney nor Canberra. Why not?

- This mine wants to lure more people from their productive work and years of training to go down risky holes for crazy salaries out of ambition or underpaid desperation. Mines are bribing and poaching our school students before their dreams can evolve, and turning tradies, nurses, teachers, waiters - none of them with truck licences - into stressed high earners within weeks. They're even offering 10,000 to sign up. This leaves vacant essential jobs in the community and families uprooted. Only the second transition away from coal can bring people back out of there, to restore their own destinies and serve their waiting customers.

- 30 So Mount Pleasant mine expansion is just as poisonous to a healthy economy as it is to our beautiful valley, and to the timeless gift of the Castle Rock ridge. I ask the IPC to leave it intact, to reject silence and lies, to allow the mine to rehabilitate after 2026, and to refuse greenfield new coal facing the Upper Hunter. Let that protective ridge remain a healing retreat for the people of Muswellbrook. Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you, Ms Atkinson, for your assistance. The next speaker is Mr Mathew Stair. Mr Stair, can you hear us?

- 40 MR STAIR: Thank you, sir. Yes.

MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead with your submission. You've got five minutes.

**<MATHEW STAIR, MUSWELLBROOK BUSINESS OWNER**

MR STAIR: Okay. Thank you. Good morning, all. I'm speaking for the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project, using just my ground-level experience. My name is Mathew Stair, born and bred in Muswellbrook, proud husband, father, Wonnarua man and business owner. I have worked in different capacities in the mining industry since '97. The majority of this work has been in the light-vehicle repair game. I've been  
10 lucky enough to gain experience and connections needed to now have my own light vehicle shop.

In 2016 we opened the doors to Valley Service and Repairs. Today we permanently employed five Muswellbrook residents, with number six starting on Monday the 11<sup>th</sup>. The majority of our client base, and I'll be honest, is not mining companies direct. No, we specialise in the contractor fleet space, looking out for company vehicle fleets who just happen to contract direct to the coalmines - Beran, JMG, DK, PPS Perth, Hunter Tray, FFR Supply Solutions, just to name a few.

20 We do, however, have a revenue stream with a couple of local coalmines. This does include vehicle servicing repairs, but also includes a side of the business that I didn't expect to develop, and that's designing and installing Indigenous artwork. This is a side of the business that I loved ever since the opportunity was offered to us to be part of, and I haven't looked back. I've never regretted any career path I've taken, and for this I've been blessed to add to my portfolio one of passions, and that's creating and designing art that ties me to my culture. And this is all thanks to Mount Pleasant, their local Indigenous support and community awareness has not been matched by any other local coalmine.

30 On the back of this, the future for me and my company is to use both on a workshop - our skills on the workshop floor and in the Indigenous art space, to become role models for our young Muswellbrook locals, to help them find something that piques their interest in the working world, and just in life in general. I'm excited about working with Muswellbrook High School to deliver such a program. Again, thanks to Mount Pleasant, we would not be able to offer this, and they need to be commended for that, and me personally being very grateful to be part of their journey.

I'm also supporting the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project for the following, and that's without industries established and opportunities that have been created in our  
40 community, mainly by mining or a link to mining, I wouldn't be in the position I am today. Growing up in this town, we didn't have a lot of money, and I hung around

people when I was a teen that probably wasn't the best choice for me, and I did make some poor decisions. Thankfully something clicked and I changed my way of thinking, and by chance, a small automotive shop that repaired mining light vehicles gave me a shot.

I didn't choose to be born in Muswellbrook, I didn't choose to have coal under my feet, but I did choose not to do crime, I did choose to push as hard as I could to find employment and to contribute to my future and to the society, and for this I'm choosing to support mining in our town and support Mount Pleasant's Optimisation Project. Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much for that, Mr Stair. Our next speaker is Wendy Wales of the Denman Aberdeen Muswellbrook Scone Healthy Environment Group. Ms Wales, are you there? Sorry, can you hear us, Ms Wales? You may well be on mute.

MS WALES: Yes.

MR ROBERTSON: I think we can now hear you. Please go ahead. You've got 15 minutes. So you might just try again, Ms Wales. I think you're still on mute. We heard you briefly a moment ago, so you might do what you did a moment ago.

MS WALES: Is that right now?

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, we can now hear you loud and clear. Please go ahead.

**<WENDY WALES, DENMAN ABERDEEN MUSWELLBROOK SCONE  
HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT GROUP**

MS WALES: Thank you. Good morning, Commissioners. I'm Wendy Wales. I'm living on Wonnarua country, and I acknowledge that this land was never ceded. I pay my respects to the Elders past, present and emerging. I'm a member of DAMSHEG, but speaking today as an individual.

I would like to dedicate this presentation to the memory - to the people who have lost so much in the fire and floods of recent years, and to the memory David Abbott, a conscientious, joyful spirit from the Upper Hunter. He thought we should slow down and dance lightly on the earth.

I will talk generally of some local impacts, my perspective after 20 years teaching at Muswellbrook High School, and issues of our planning process, especially with respect to climate change.

I came with my primary school aged children to teach biology at Muswellbrook High School in 1995. I thought we would leave before my eldest started senior high school. However, the townships of Muswellbrook, Denman, Aberdeen and Scone are family-friendly communities that provided everything we needed for our educational, sporting, social and cultural lives.

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When I started teaching at Muswellbrook High, the Bengalla Mine was in the approval stage. We would look out of the staffroom window and try to imagine a coalmine across town. I could not imagine losing Mount Dangar on the far horizon, to be blocked by Bengalla's bread loaf overburden dump.

20

Fifteen years later, I pointed out for a colleague where Mount Pleasant coalmine was to emerge, again, unable to fathom the monstrous visual and polluting impact even now, as it continues to materialise. Gone or going are the vistas of rolling hills and far horizons. There is much of Muswellbrook that now feels contained in a bowl, quite unlike the 1980s Max Watters tapestry depiction hanging in the Muswellbrook Shire Chambers.

30

As a teacher, I diligently provided environmental education. Muswellbrook High School took part in tree planting and Clean Up Australia Days, with secured Enviro Trust grants, and put in several native gardens on previously eroded sites. We took part in the electric vehicle competitions and solar boat challenges, energy smart programs, stream watch, World Environment Day, school working bees. I took students to present in Sydney, to the SRC and Youth Lead The World congress. It was extra for me, so I continually asked for and received help from colleagues, parents and community. I was compelled to make sure that kids of Muswellbrook knew something of these environmental opportunities.

So, Commissioners, please know that I have had a deep engagement with students and parents in Muswellbrook. I can say authoritatively that Upper Hunter people are concerned about the negative consequences of mining. Doorknocking surveys by Lock the Gate have shown locals appreciate the benefits that have come from coalmining. They know change is coming, and they think planning should go into the transition away from coal.

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However, it is not a topic of polite conversation. People around Muswellbrook are particularly conflicted in their loyalty, to their employer, partner, family and/or

friends. But they still see the glaringly obvious mess that this out-of-balance industry has become in our town. We expect government protection and intervention for our health and our environment.

In the time I have lived in Muswellbrook, I have experienced the cumulative impact, particularly of the deterioration of landscape and air quality, to the point that Muswellbrook postcode was declared to have the worst air quality in New South Wales. I am left to wonder if my lymphoma was a consequence of cycling to school in polluted air, or sleeping with the window open at night. Were the cancers that took out our dear friend and neighbour Gavin and afflicted his wife Adrienne, all of us in the same year, connected? There were only six of us living on that road.

The IPC hearing held for Drayton South was very hostile and intimidating period for locals. Pro-mining signs were everywhere, including attached to the preschool gate. Groups of men in orange shirts collected petition signatures down the main street, and even from vulnerable people in opportunity ships. There was a \$7,000-a-month billboard on the approach to Muswellbrook that gave instructions to the IPC to approve the mine.

I am not surprised many people in Muswellbrook will not engage openly in the discussion. We are disbelieving victims, unable to comprehend that our environmental laws do not protect us from a mega-mine close and upwind to our town.

One significant social impact has been that Muswellbrook has relatively cheap real estate - cheapest in the state, I was told by a man in a wheelchair who relocated here because he could afford the house he needed. People come here mostly because they can afford the entry price. But I don't think you would classify it as a prosperous town, for all the mines and their higher wages, and many can't afford the air pollution.

Last summer, our air was really quite awful, despite the mild weather. The still, moist morning and evening air frequently smelt of what I think was a sulphurous odour. I reported it to the EPA and urged others to do so. My friend said if she reported every time, she would be on the phone all day.

But the next issue here is that this problem was not detected in the air quality monitoring. It turns out that knocks and socks readings were wrong because the inflow rate of meter was wrong, for two months, December 2021 to February '22. Air-quality monitoring is used to provide data and health alerts to vulnerable people. When our protective systems don't work and the mines and systems are fully operational and fully funded, how well can we expect them to work when they are gone?

This missing data allowed the summary report to be written saying we had good air quality over the summer. The report is being corrected, however, the telling and deleterious data, which would have contained two months of breaches and this feeds our understanding cumulative impacts on air quality, that data is not there, and it's negative data, and it's basically neutralised and discounted in this way. So that's a grave problem.

10 The cumulative air impact from mines and power stations is quite observable on our horizon, and it has been noted that once the temperature reaches 28 degrees C, the air quality dives.

Our last two summers have been mild, which has been lucky with respect to dust, for the people of Muswellbrook, downwind of Mount Pleasant. Along with clean air, we have lost many of our really quiet places to a dull drone of the coalmines under our dark starry nights to mine light glare.

20 Unfortunately, the Department of Planning and Environment assessment report does not provide any sense of prioritising the wellbeing of Upper Hunter people, or indeed, humanity, ahead of the proponents of the commercial objectives. As I read through the Department of Planning's final assessment report, I had the uncomfortable feeling I was in the room with Little Red Riding Hood, being assured by the wolf under grandma's bonnet.

30 For example, the Department of Planning and Assessment that the negative impacts of dust and noise will be felt by 30 receivers living near the mine while the rest of the community will benefit socially and economically leaves me bewildered. I doubt there are many people in Muswellbrook who don't have an issue with dust, and certainly more than 30 experience the noise, including the squeaky brakes of coal trains as they pass through the countryside - Muswellbrook, Singleton - the towns and cities such as Maitland and Newcastle, all day and all night.

Another completely different example, should the increased elevation of the development's waste rock emplacement result in adverse impacts on the reception of broadcasting services from Rossgole, tower transmission facilities, the applicant must implement make-good provisions.

40 Commissioners, Rossgole tower provides emergency services, TV and mobile phone reception to Muswellbrook. The Department of Planning is prepared to have this left to see if it happens. It needs to be mandated in the conditions of consent that

appropriate modelling and remediation anticipate and prevent these potential communication failures, or put bluntly, lives will be lost.

Along with fairy tales come magic tricks. MACH applied for a six-year extension to the previous undeveloped 20-year lease, the foot in the door in the dying days of the lease. Now MACH applies for a 22-year lease, and the Department of Planning explained to the public how greenfield became brownfield.

10 Commissioners, many of the objectors were here at the last Independent Planning Commission, because we could see the tricky steps of the banners. That MACH was given a six-year extension to start mining and prepare its EIS was an outrage at the time. Since then the warnings about climate change have materialised with ever-increasing frequency and intensity. MACH has known from the start the social licence of climate-change producing energies was destined to wane. Just because they decided to fly in the face of that risk doesn't mean they should be rewarded with another 22 years at double the rate of production. While we can admire the audacity, we cannot afford to maintain this disconnect. The Premier said last night the settings have to change.

20 While we in Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter Shire are somehow getting all these mining benefits - again, somehow, we can't afford to fix the roads after the intensifying and frequent flood disasters. Again, floods this week. Our road was washed out in December last year. Council told us the road would be fixed before Christmas using state emergency funding, but our road is still washing away. Councils and the State Governments are not able to repair the weather-related damage at the rate it is currently occurring. How can we countenance adding so much fuel to this fire?

30 Along with the local issues, such as air pollution, visual pollution, noise interference, and loss of ground and surface water, climate change is the elephant in the room. I have addressed the IPC and PAC hearings for decades, calling for climate change to be taken seriously, long before the North Queensland floods that killed 600,000 head of cattle, Brisbane flooding however many times, Lismore and the region floods, the fish kills on the Barka, the intense drought, and the horrific bushfires of the summer of 2019-2020. Climate scientists told us what was coming, and the fossil fuel countered with denial, even taking out our Prime Minister in its \$100 million advertising campaign. They only needed to spend 20 million before the Government folded.

40 When the Rudd Labor Government came to office in 2007, I enrolled in a Master of Environmental Education degree, excited that we had a government that saw climate

change as the moral imperative. By the time I had finished my degree, that source of optimism had vapourised.

However, the Australian people voted convincingly in the May election that is time to address climate change. It is completely reckless to approve Mount Pleasant.

10 However, many of our politician are captive to coal industry. The former Federal Member for Hunter said he intended to become a lobbyist now that he has retired, and his successor is a coalminer, who stated his intention is to keep coalminers working in coalmines. Our previous state member called those of us challenging the approval of more coalmines “cashed-up protestors from the ‘60s”. They might not place nature  
above short-term jobs, but nature doesn’t care about us or our jobs at all.

The Federal Government commitment to coal is quite apparent in their local millions of dollars upgrade of the rail bridge infrastructure happening in Muswellbrook, estimated at the beginning at 58 million. While it is for coal and passenger trains, the only public transport west is by bus. This is just one small example of Federal Government subsidising the coal industry, including Mount Pleasant.

20 To me, the assessment report reads like a lobbying document. It is not detached from the proponent or anchored in the climate change reality we are living today, in the flooded streets and washed-away houses, roads and businesses. This disconnect between the mining of coal for questionable profit and the climate change consequences is an unacceptable position for a planning department. New South Wales should not be open for this type of business. This approval, as with the 2019 approval, is an attempt to be in the last cohort of approved coalmines. We know our global carbon budget is already spent. If we are to keep global average temperatures to 1.5 degrees C, if we are to keep temperature increases - we may keep about - between about 10 and 30 per cent of coral reefs.

30 In the ‘70s, I sailed - - -

MR ROBERTSON: I’m sorry, Ms Wales. I’m sorry to interrupt, Ms Wales, but the time allocated for you has expired. Would you be kind enough to submit the rest of your notes to the Commission? If you can do that by the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, they will have the benefit of that, but before we go to the next speaker, I think Professor Fell has a question of you.

PROFESSOR FELL: Ms Wales, thank you for your presentation. I just wonder, in your experience, is there a season in the year when the air quality is worst? I’m sorry.  
40 Ms Wales, thank you for your presentation. Is there a season in the year, when, in your experience, the air pollution is worst?

MS WALES: Well, it's actually - my - I'm getting whispered at me "winter", but it's also summer. It's very - so when we have the really still mornings, where there's temperature inversions, we can have, you know, as that picture shows, my background picture shows, we can have the air just sits and there's no circulation. But in the summer, once the temperature has hit 28 degrees, that's when it's really on.

10 So, you know, we have - most of our winds are from the north-west. We have south-easterly winds as well, but more frequently we have pretty strong nor'westers as well. So that - there's the ones that kick up the dust. But - so wind is a factor, and heat is a factor, but also when we have the temperature inversions of winter, we have the air sitting still over town, and not circulating, and then just everything just stays here, so that's my - - -

PROFESSOR FELL: So basically, summarising what you told me, you said summer, when inversions occur, and winter. What days in summer and winter?

MS WALES: Yes.

20 PROFESSOR FELL: Thank you. That's very helpful. Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much for that contribution, Ms Wales. As I said, in relation to the remainder of what you wanted to say, it would be of assistance to the panel if you could submit that in writing, and that way they'll have the benefit of anything that you didn't get to say in your allocated timing.

MS WALES: Thank you.

30 MR ROBERTSON: The next speaker is Robbie Allison from Blackroo Industries. Mr Allison, can you hear us?

MR ALLISON: Yeah - g'day, mate, how are you?

MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead. You've got 10 minutes allocated to you.

**<ROBBIE ALLISON, BLACKROO INDUSTRIES**

40 MR ALLISON: So, as mentioned, my name is Robbie Allison, and I just - I wanted to just briefly say something, just because I've been involved in coming up to the valley since about 2008, so in 2008 I started - so I also own a vending company separately that supplies and maintains vending machines, in a range of different ways, to

businesses across the - well, New South Wales and of course across Australia, but specifically the Hunter area, and I guess the thing that most stands out for me, or the reason that I think that this is really important to keep this moving forward, is that since 2008 I've seen a lot of different businesses growing over the time.

I've worked directly at some points for Mount Pleasant, and I've supported companies that support Mount Pleasant, and as I've seen this happen, I guess I can say that I've - from experience, Mount Pleasant would be the best mine in the valley, and the ones that are most supportive to helping some of the smaller companies get a start, get a leg-up, and to grow their businesses. And I think that that means - it means such a lot to the community. I know that the question of coal is a big one, and when's it going to happen, and probably in 25 years from now it won't be, or however it will be, but, you know, as you've got, I guess, BHP finishing soon, you look at, what's going to happen to the - you know, the region if there's not the infrastructure in place for the next opportunities to be starting for people as that starts to tail down, and then you've got a situation where, you know, there's going to be a lot of, you know, unemployment coming from the fact that that's finishing.

I volunteer for Blackroo, which is a community group, and hopefully we're going to make a little bit of a difference to help people get back on their feet. One of the things that was really cool was Mount Pleasant helped us create a barbecue trailer, and that trailer can be taken by any community group, so any netball team or soccer club can take it, raise money with it, they can, you know, obviously help their community teams to get out there and do something cool with it, and that's - you know, that sort of thing that's happening from Mount Pleasant is - it's a wonderful underlying support to the community, which, you know, if that's not there, and as BHP leaves up, I'm not quite sure what's, you know - what would happen to the 600 jobs that, you know, Mount Pleasant offers at the moment?

And it's wider than that. It's all the other businesses that flow on from it that help, you know, supply - obviously there will be, at some point, a transition - in time, things will change - but for the immediate future, and, I guess, for the underlying health of the town and the people living in it, you know, there needs to be, I guess, a transition. But for now, we really need to get behind Mount Pleasant and support it to help, you know, the - help people thrive and move forward, and, you know, a dollar from a mine is a dollar into the town that helps, you know, families.

So that's - I guess that's my - what I wanted to just say and put forward today. I just wanted to thank you very much for letting me have a chance to just say how I think it's important from somebody on the outside, looking in, and now being somebody that's in a community group trying to help people - you know, what a massive impact

and level of help a really good, supportive, big company in the town is to helping out. So that's my - that's from me. Thank you very much for letting me have a chance to speak.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much for that contribution, Mr Allison. The next speaker is Justin Field. He's a member of the Legislative Council of New South Wales. Mr Field, are you there?

MR FIELD: I am, and just checking that you can hear me.

10

MR ROBERTSON: I can hear you loud and clear, as can the rest of the panel, or as can the panel, and five minutes has been allocated to you. Please go ahead.

**<JUSTIN FIELD, MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

MR FIELD: Thank you very much, and thank you, Commissioners, for the opportunity to make a submission to his public hearing. I'm an Independent member of the New South Wales Legislative Council. I've spent quite a bit of my time in the last six or so years in parliament working on issues associated with the impacts of coal and gas projects on New South Wales, and the imperative, both an ecological and economic imperative, to transition away from coal and other fossil fuel extraction, and to reduce New South Wales's carbon footprint, as its contribution to both our Australian and also global contribution to avoid catastrophic climate change.

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I urge you to refuse this proposal, the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project, because of its substantial greenhouse gas emissions, especially at a time when the state needs to urgently reduce emissions to meet both its stated long-term net zero by 2050 target, but also the very real medium-term challenge to get to 50 per cent reduction by 2030.

30

I think it's inconceivable to many in the public, where there is a scientific consensus that emissions must peak and fall dramatically to net zero emissions by 2050, that any responsible government would consider expanding coalmining in New South Wales. But in fact we have a situation in New South Wales where not only are expansions but also new coalmining proposals, and also new coal and gas exploration, is being considered. I think the public do not understand how we can both achieve those emission reduction emissions and allow this type of development.

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And that is echoed by global calls from not just the scientific community but the global energy industry, and all those that recognise this challenge for humanity, that

we must leave fossil fuels in the ground to have any chance of avoiding catastrophic climate change.

10 In the case of the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project, this would extend operations for an additional 22 years, to end in 2048 rather than 2026, just two years before we are due to reach our net zero target, a target that has been set by most responsible jurisdictions around the world. Over that time, annual coalmining from the project would double from 10.5 million tonnes per annum to 21 million tonnes per annum. Cumulatively, the scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions over 850 millions tonnes of additional carbon dioxide equivalent would be released into the atmosphere as a result of the mining and burning of this coal. At 850 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent, that combined emissions over the life represents more than six times New South Wales's annual emissions. So this is by no means a small additional contribution.

20 Now, I understand that for the most of the elements of your decision-making, you're not considering the scope 3 emissions, the emissions from the burning of this coal in another jurisdiction. However, I do think that we should be, and that that in and of itself should rule out any new coalmining. But I think it's also worth having a look at just the scope 1 and 2 emissions, which you are able to more directly and easily control, through either the refusal of this project, which I hope for, or any conditioning.

30 Considering those scope 1 emissions, lifetime emissions are estimated by the proponent to be just over 14 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. Now, I note from the submission from the department's net zero emissions team that almost 4 million tonnes of fugitive emissions - that's about 30 per cent of the total scope 1 and 2 emissions - is above what was forecast in the NSW Government's modelling under its net zero emissions plan. This appears to be due to the government's forecast for fugitive emissions to be much lower than those that the proponent has now acknowledged in their estimates.

In this regard, the statement by the Planning Department in their assessment report that - and I quote - "The project submissions have been accounted for in the New South Wales greenhouse gas emissions projections in the NSW Government's net zero plan," is simply not accurate. This additional 4 million tonnes of unaccounted for fugitive emissions is substantial - is substantial, if we are going to achieve the targets of 50 per cent reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2050.

40 Commissioners, regarding that comment, that the assessment report - in the assessment report and from net zero team, that the project was factored into the modelling, I would note that that modelling has not been made public. What has been

made public in the original net zero plan and the 2020 to 2030 implementation update is a very, very general sense of the contribution various forms of emission reduction would contribute to meeting the 50 per cent by 2030 target.

MR ROBERTSON: Mr Field, I'm sorry to interrupt, but do you have any idea how much longer in terms of what you propose to say?

MR FIELD: About one minute.

10 MR ROBERTSON: With the Chair's permission, we might give an additional extension of time. Please continue, thank you.

MR FIELD: Apologies. I would urge, Commissioners, for you to scrutinise those assumptions very strongly. I've raised previous hearings into the Narrabri Underground Project that the Planning Minister has indicated to me through parliamentary questions that the current New South Wales planning framework requires coalmining companies to demonstrate they have minimised scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions from coalmining, and requires consent authority to consider conditions to further minimise those emissions.

20

The reality of the planning system in New South Wales is that there is no criteria as to what would constitute the greatest extent practicable. I have yet to see where that has been implemented, and certainly where - cannot see where it is being forced through the planning system's enforcement of conditions of consent.

Commissioners, I urge you to cast your mind forward to the decade 2040, 2050, when New South Wales is striving to reach its net zero target, and can you imagine at that time that a coalmine would still be operating in Australia, causing significant emissions. The reality is, if we are going to prevent that from happening in 2048, the decision is being taken right now, and that is your decision to make and I urge you to refuse this project. Thank you.

30

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you for that submission, Mr Field. The next speaker is Dr Catherine Chicken. Dr Chicken, can you hear us?

DR CHICKEN: Yes, I can. Can you hear me?

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, we can. Please go ahead. You've got five minutes allocated.

40

DR CHICKEN: Can I just share my screen with you?

MR ROBERTSON: We can see that. Thank you.

DR CHICKEN: Have you got the screen shot, or have you got this interview?

MR ROBERTSON: We can see the main screen, and we can also see your next slide.

DR CHICKEN: Okay. Hang on.

10 MR ROBERTSON: But we can see both sides of the page. That's sufficient, at least for our purposes.

DR CHICKEN: That's fine. I'm happy to carry on if you're happy.

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, please continue.

DR CHICKEN: Okay. Just let me move this inbox. All right.

MR ROBERTSON: I'm sorry, you might need to go back to where you were before -  
20 no, that's fine, we can now see your slides. Thank you.

DR CHICKEN: Can you see everything?

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, we can. Thank you .

**<DR CATHERINE CHICKEN, SCONE EQUINE HOSPITAL**

DR CHICKEN: Yes. So my name is Catherine Chicken, and I'm consultant vet at  
Scone Equine Hospital. I sit on the Upper Hunter Air Quality Advisory Committee as  
30 a representative of the equine industry. I speak to you today, though, as a concerned  
local community member and not in any other capacity, and I'd like to acknowledge  
the Wonnarua people, on whose land we sit today, and pay my respects to their Elders  
past, present and emerging.

It is hard to know what to focus on in a five-minute window, but I'd like to  
concentrate on the cumulative impacts of open-cut coalmining industry in this region,  
and it's with a sense of déjà vu that I speak again today, outlining the fact that no  
cumulative impact studies have been performed in this highly impacted region, despite  
increasing volumes of coal extraction occurring in close proximity to population  
40 centres, particularly to Muswellbrook.

The baseline for each new approval or modification or optimisation project is the status quo at the time of the application and does not consider the cumulative impacts over time. It's not hard to hear, see, and smell, at times, the immediate negative impacts of these mines collectively. Poor air quality and trashed visual amenity affect the physical and mental health of local residents day-in, day-out, in Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project, the irony of the name of which is not lost on anyone living in this area as a polluting project aiming to double coal extraction out to 2048. It will do nothing to alleviate negative impacts on the communities and its neighbours, particularly those in Muswellbrook, and indeed, by its very nature it can only increase them. I'd also just like to touch on the planning system, which we're all expected to operate under, and is serving no-one well.

So let's just start with air quality. The Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network is a series of 14 air monitors located throughout the Upper Hunter, and it's been in place for the last nine years, providing valuable data on the air quality of this valley. This graph shows the PM10 and 2.5 rolling annual averages to the end of autumn, from 2013 to 2021, and it's important to note that these are rolling annual averages which smooth out the peaks in the air pollution and do not therefore show the moments in time that air pollution is at its worst, and depending on weather conditions, these incidences have been considerable in frequency and magnitude, and this data is also available on the network.

Of greatest relevance to this optimisation project are the PM2.5 and 10 averages at Muswellbrook and Aberdeen, population centres in the PM10 averages at Muswellbrook north-west, the monitor located between the mine at Mount Pleasant and the township of Muswellbrook.

There is no PM2.5 monitor at Muswellbrook north-west, nor at Aberdeen, and this is the township to the north of this advancing open-cut coalmine, and therefore the impact of the most damaging ultrafine particulate matter on the health of this residents cannot be monitored at these important sites.

It's known there is no safe level of air pollution, and the effects of elevated levels of PM2.5 on our region's populations have never been determined. There have been no local epidemiological studies, and we're playing a long game with people's health and the effects on these communities.

So the monitoring network provides evidence base for the air quality issues of this region, and we have not been successful in effecting meaningful, long-term downward pressure on air pollution, despite the many worthwhile initiatives implemented by EPA in consultation with the mining industry. PM2.5 levels from diesel emissions

generate both significant offroad and train activity related to the Mount Pleasant Mine are not fully quantified, and these cumulative impacts keep mounting with each new approval for expanding open-cut coalmine extraction in our regions.

The impacts of open-cut coalmining and coal-fired power generation are significant for all to see, smell, and at times even taste, in this region. Promoting tourism in the Upper Hunter is a desirable destination. To visit is already challenging in light of the visual blight on the landscape from Muswellbrook surrounds and south to Singleton, effectively the gateway to the Upper Hunter.

10

To maintain a diversified economy that is essential to the future prosperity of this area, conflicting land-use issues must be addressed more holistically, and consideration given to the impact of continued expansion of open-cut coalmines across our landscape.

20

Doubling of coal extraction of this mine in a time of urgently required action on climate change seems totally paradoxical. We have a commitment by all levels of government now to effect meaningful change in relation to carbon emissions, yet approvals for increased coal extraction are ongoing. We have a broken, outdated system that's not fit for purpose, and is serving no-one at all well. Planning is process-driven rather than outcomes-focused, and the often under-resourced EPA is then responsible for enforcing conditions on all fossil fuel extraction projects, a huge ask in this region.

MR ROBERTSON: Dr Chicken, I'm sorry to cut across for you - - -

DR CHICKEN: I'd like to thank you very much for your time.

30

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you. Sorry, please finish.

DR CHICKEN: I'd like to thank you very much for your time and ask you to look at the whole picture in our valley in relation to your consideration of this Optimisation Project.

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MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much for that contribution, Dr Chicken. Can I ask you to provide those slides to the Commission, because that may well be of benefit to them during the course of their deliberations. Further, if there's any further submissions that you wish to make in writing, you and everyone else are entitled to make those submissions to the Commission by the 15<sup>th</sup> of July - that's Friday, the 15<sup>th</sup> of July - at 5pm.

DR CHICKEN: Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: The next speaker is Dr Sam Nugent. Dr Nugent, can you hear us?

**<DR SAM NUGENT, SCONE EQUINE HOSPITAL**

DR NUGENT: Good afternoon, Commissioners. My name is Dr Sam Nugent. I'm an equine veterinarian of 27 years experience, an Upper Hunter resident of over 10 20 years and a director of Scone Equine Hospital. Thank you for the opportunity to present my submission on behalf of Scone Equine Hospital, and to explain in detail our business, our relevance to the thoroughbred industry, and to this Independent Planning Commission hearing.

Scone Equine Hospital is the largest equine veterinary practice in the Southern Hemisphere. We employ over 140 people, 35 veterinarians, 10 of which are registered specialists, and over 85 support staff, so significantly we're a major employer of professionals and skilled people in rural New South Wales.

20 Our business is a major service provider to the thoroughbred industry, with over 90 per cent of our turnover generated locally. As the largest equine veterinary practice in Australia, we have the people, the knowledge, the equipment and the facilities to service every aspect of the many equine communities in the region. Our size and position ensures that we can offer referral services, equipment and expertise at a level which is just not financially possible in general veterinary practice in Australia.

For our 70 years, Scone Equine Hospital has been working with, living in and supporting the local community. We sponsor over 50 community groups and organisations, and are a major sponsor of all horse-related activities in the area. Our 30 practice is committed to ongoing research and training. Our veterinarians are recognised for their knowledge and skills throughout the world, and Scone Equine Hospital is recognised as a world-class centre of equine health.

Our veterinarians delivering first-class research, they've published scientific articles in most of the major international journals, and have made scientific presentations at conferences throughout the globe. Our veterinarians serve as representatives on many of the equine organisations, which administer, advocate and set the standard for equine health care, competition, education and professionalism, both locally and nationally.

We provide training to over 40 veterinary students annually, and training of veterinary nurses through TAFE. Much of this is important, because with student numbers increasing, the resources of the tertiary institutions are struggling to keep pace.

Our practice is only able to provide this level of commitment to research, training, the profession and the community due to our size, caseload and viability. We're in a unique situation for a veterinary practice, and we are totally dependent on a strong and vibrant horse industry in the Upper Hunter.

- 10 Scone Equine Hospital has substantial plans to invest and grow. We've been planning a new world-class leading, state of the art equine hospital, and building is soon to commence. This development is a major milestone for a practice that will reinforce the Upper Hunter's global position as the major equine centre in the Southern Hemisphere. The facility has had and will continue to have major economic benefits to the region during planning, development and operation.

- 20 The success of Scone Equine Hospital and our reputation as one of the major participants in the equine industry around the world is built on the strength of the Upper Hunter as the horse capital of Australia and the premiere horse-breeding area in the country. The equine industry in the Upper Hunter is an extensive network of farms, supplies and support businesses. It is recognised by the New South Wales State Government as a critical industry cluster because of the concentration and vertical integration of the farms and the support services, and it's recognised by the horse industry around the world as one of the only three centres of horse-breeding excellence.

- 30 The reputation of the Upper Hunter thoroughbred industry serves as the anchor that holds the stallion farms, brood mare farms, support industry and investment in the area. Damage to the air quality, water availability, and, most importantly, the visual amenity of the region will have a significant adverse effect on the reputation and brand of the Upper Hunter industry with devastating flow-on effects to support industries such as ours.

The horse-raising land of the Upper Hunter is unique in the world and has attracted investment from around the globe, investment that has come under significant threat due to the land-use issues in our region. The sustainable land use and industry has developed over 200 years cannot be threatened for the sake of a short-term mining proposal.

- 40 The previous Bickham, Drayton South and Dartbrook planning assessment commissions all recognised the importance of the equine industry's sustainability of

the economy of the Upper Hunter, and this recognition is especially important now as we plan for a transition to a non-coal-based energy future.

Commissioners, for the sake of our business, our industry, our environment and our community, Scone Equine Hospital and the people we serve in the Upper Hunter, strongly urge you to reject this proposal. Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: Dr Nugent, thank you for that submission. Professor Fell has a question for you.

10

PROFESSOR FELL: Dr Nugent, thank you. In your opinion, are the national environmental protection measures standards for PM10 and PM2.5 appropriate for an equine environment?

DR NUGENT: That is a question that's very hard to answer, because I don't believe there's been the research into exactly the level of particulate or the size of the particulate matter that would affect the horse, and, yes, so I'd have to seek further clarification on that issue, which I'm happy to do and supply you with the information.

20 PROFESSOR FELL: That would be very helpful, thank you.

DR NUGENT: O.K.

MR ROBERTSON: And, Dr Nugent, if you could kindly provide any submissions or any further information on that question by the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, that would be of assistance to the Commission.

DR NUGENT: Okay. Thank you.

30 MR ROBERTSON: Thank you for your time today. Commissioners, that ends the series of speakers before the luncheon break. I propose to call the next speaker at 1pm this afternoon.

#### **LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT**

**[12.05pm]**

MR ROBERTSON: Commissioners, the next speaker is Mr Kurt Gidley. Mr Gidley, can you hear us?

MR GIDLEY: Yes, loud and clear.

40

MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead for your submission. Five minutes have been allocated to you.

**<KURT GIDLEY, PROTECH GROUP**

MR GIDLEY: Okay. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Kurt Gidley, I'm the Business Development Manager, New South Wales for Protech Group. Protech are a national recruitment and workforce solutions provider to a variety of different industries and certainly one of those being the mining sector. Under Protech Group we have an Indigenous arm called Dreampath. Dreampath is majority owned by Steve Fordham from Blackrock industries and is in joint venture with the Protech Managing Director Mark Meili and is a supply nation-accredited business.

Now, a few years back 2019 I attended New South Wales Minerals Council event at Singleton and I had the pleasure of meeting Ngaire Baker from MACH Energy at Mount Pleasant. Ngaire and I hit it off pretty quickly and shared plenty of common interests and passions for our local community. We continued to have a chat post that event and really wanted to discuss what opportunities there would be potentially for Dreampath, our Indigenous recruitment arm, to provide long term career opportunities for local Indigenous men and woman, boys and girls in that area and we continued to sort of collaborate between Dreampath, Blackrock Industries, Protech and MACH Energy and through plenty of persistence and passion and belief we were able to secure a contract with Sedgman, the contractor for the CHPP there at Mount Pleasant operation.

So it was a huge win and a step forward for us to be able to provide those future career opportunities for the local people of the Muswellbrook and the Hunter region and on the 28th of December, 2020 we started our first female Indigenous employee which was a great step forward at the CHPP there at Sedgman and on the back of that relationship we've since started two more. So we've had three start over the past - just over 18 months. I guess there's a real passion for me personally to be able to provide those career opportunities but really potentially could be life-changing employment opportunities that really bring stability and security to the families of our employees that we've started at Mount Pleasant operation and, I guess, my passion is to continue to foster that relationship with MACH Energy and Mount Pleasant and Sedgman to continue to provide these future traineeship - two-year traineeships to local Indigenous men and women and boys and girls.

I guess my previous career I've done and volunteered in a number of community events, something that I'm very passionate about and I also recognise and take notice of when other members of the community and certainly when businesses also invest

their time and money into the local community and I've certainly witnessed that firsthand that MACH Energy at Mount Pleasant certainly invest and they walk the talk when it comes to investing back into the local community in regards to programs and funds for local schools, junior sporting clubs, Indigenous groups, the arts, Lions Club and probably just as recent as this week in NAIDOC week. I know it's a huge focus for MACH Energy to give back to the local community and certainly I know - that's my time. But the future of Mount Pleasant will have a significant influence, I believe, on the local community and the broader region so thank you.

- 10 MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much, Mr Gidley. The next speaker is Mr Michael White. Mr White, please go ahead. You've got 15 minutes allocated.

MR WHITE: Thanks very much. I'll just check you hear me okay?

MR ROBERTSON: I can hear you loud and clear, Mr White, thank you.

**<MICHAEL WHITE, LOCAL RESIDENT**

- 20 MR WHITE: Thank you. Good afternoon, Commissioners. My name is Michael White, I'm a local resident and have been for 20 years. My farm is located at Wybong, 15 kilometres west of the current Mount Pleasant mine. I'm a mining engineer with more than 25 years experience in technical and operational roles both here in Australia and internationally. I have 16 years experience in the coal in New South Wales and Queensland and for eight of those years I was responsible for the running of Mount Arthur Coal at Muswellbrook. I'm an independent resource consultant and I've done for a number of groups making submissions to you on this project today including the Hunter Thoroughbred Breeders Association.

- 30 I am a community member of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Advisory Committee. Today I speak to you as a community resident. This project should not be approved. As a nation we know climate change is real and we've seen terrifying examples of this with the recent fires and floods in New South Wales. We know we have to get to a zero carbon economy as quickly as possible. We know what the International Energy Agency has said about coal. There should be no new mines or approvals past 2022. As a father and grandfather I feel a heavy responsible to ensure we're leaving a strong, positive legacy for our future generations. As a region we know we need to plan a rapid transition away from thermal coalmining to other long term sustainable industries. I have a presentation that I would like to share with you. Could you please just let me know that you are able to see this.

40

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, we can see that, Mr White, thank you.

MR WHITE: Okay. Thank you. So in my view this project is too big, doubling the output is not justified. It's too close to the communities of Muswellbrook and Aberdeen and requesting 26-year approval from today is too long. The final landform is a terrible lasting legacy for the Upper Hunter and regarding fines reject management, the Upper Hunter community has been badly let down by both MACH and the NSW Government and I'll talk about that. Air quality in the Upper Hunter is already among the worst in the state and you will have heard that talked about before. I have a graph here which is similar to Dr Chicken's, source being the EPA.

10

My data shows the PM2.5 annual actual levels for the last 10 years, and for Muswellbrook you can see that eight of those last 10 years it has been exceeding the NEPM of 8. We made some ground and then we started going backwards around 2017. So let's look at the final landform. This slide shows you the final landform as was from the 1997 EIS and as was approved in the original consent. There were three final voids and final levels in the far northern area were up around 300 or exceeded 300 metres. Muswellbrook is down here to the south-west, but the points I'd make is this was 25 years ago for a very different mine plan and down here near Muswellbrook the levels were only around 250 above height (not transcribable) and you'll notice that the fines reject area blended in the final landform quite consistently with surrounding terrain.

20

Now let's look at what's proposed in this project. All along this eastern stockpile the proposal is for heights above 360 metres. The department says this is only an increase of 40 metres from what was previously approved, referring back to the 23 year old approval but my view is down here near Muswellbrook with views to the west it's an increase of over 110 metres. The final void is proposed to be over three kilometres long and half a kilometre wide. Now, the project proposes to leave that final void with water quality increasing in salinity forever. Two reasons stated by MACH for not filling that in are, among other things, it will cost a billion dollars to fill it in and they don't want salinity levels migrating towards the Hunter River, it needs to be a sink.

30

Well, at the current coal prices at 400 US dollars a tonne my estimate is MACH's making about \$3 billion a year. They can afford to fill it in. And then the other thing regarding the salinity levels I note that MACH has recently revised their predicted inflows from their EIS estimate of 5500 microsiemens down to 900 microsiemens. Now, 900 is a level that is seen in the upper levels of the Hunter River, doesn't that also negate the requirement for there to be a sink if that's the sort of levels? The other unnatural scar on this landscape is the final landform for this tailings dam or euphemistically called the fines rejects emplacement area and I'll come to that shortly.

40

I believe there's no compelling case that's really been made for the necessity for 26 year approval on this project and there really isn't a good case for why it's got a doubling output to 21 million tonnes a year and why the heights need to be so high. It doesn't need to go so hard, it doesn't need to go so high, it doesn't need to have so much impact. The mine plan for this project has been developed on a strategy of working out just how hard and how high MACH can go and always be at the very edge or over exceeding environmental limits. If approved it will be always living on that boundary of just in or out of compliance and having little social acceptability. I submit that for the IPC to consider approving this project every aspect of this project should be innovative. Two of those innovations could be no final void and returning to what was described as an innovative emplacement strategy and I'll talk about that now.

In 1997 a commission of inquiry was conducted into the environmental aspects of the Mount Pleasant DA. Hearings were conducted in 1998 and '99. The Commission's report was finalised in May '99 and the inquiry required Coal & Allied to consider alternative methods and technologies for the final coal rejects emplacement and as an outcome the inquiry accepted the proposed conclusion that the use and ongoing rehabilitation of small tailings dams was the preferred option. As stated by Coal & Allied this option has low technical risk and allows ongoing early rehabilitation of the dams areas. It is the preferred option of technical and economic grounds.

This option had fines rejects pumped to a series of stepped emplacements, nine in total. As each emplacement filled, other emplacements would be placed immediately downstream. The filled emplacement is then allowed to dry out before being covered by rock and top soil and revegetated and then water from the rehabilitated areas in the top of the catchment is then diverted around the central dam and maximises downstream flows of natural runoff. There's progressive development of storages minimising the extent of catchment disturbed at any one time and a series of emplacement terraces are constructed and shaped to blend into the surrounding topography.

So what's happened since then? Well, MACH decided, and it was approved by the DPE, that they would toss that out and construct what they called a contemporary method, construction of one large dam for all fines rejects during the life of the project, one big dam wall at the bottom and progressive raising the height of that wall over the life of the project and additional storage being required and now in this project proposal it's proposed to double that capacity from 17 to 36 million cubic metres, increase the dam wall height by almost 40 metres to just under 70 metres height and have an area of impact of 166 hectares.

This so-called contemporary strategy that was proposed by MACH and approved by DPE in Mod 3 is a retrograde step and it's at odds with the original '99 approval. It does not maximise natural runoff, downstream flows, it does not minimise the disturbed area footprint, it does not have a multi-cell arrangement, it does not seek to blend in with the surrounding topography, there will be one large embankment much higher than the proposed terraces. It does not allow for early and progressive rehabilitation and does not allow for any rehabilitation to occur until several years after mine closure assuming rejects have dried out sufficiently.

- 10 MACH's statement that the project proposal fines emplacement has a smaller disturbance footprint than the original '97 proposal is misleading because the original proposal included the staged rehabilitation and progressive return to the cells to clean water runoff. There is nothing innovative in this tailings management strategy at all. One mooted tailings to top soil research project appears to have sunk without a trace and it was not even reported in the latest ACAP project review in May this year. This graph or plan shows you from the original - in year 10 of the original approval from '99 how already an area has been rehabilitated and returned to clean water runoff. The right-hand graph shows the approved footprint in 2025 of MACH Mod 3. We then go to the MACH Mod 3 footprint again and now the jumbo footprint from this project
- 20 with this massive dam wall. It's not good enough.

- Now we're talking about fine particle characterisation and my concerns regarding PM2.5. DPE and industry identified wood smoke and road vehicle exhaust as the major contributors to PM2.5 and continue to rely on an Upper Hunter fine particle characterisation study with data collected in 2012, 10 years ago. In the interim period there have been major mine expansions in the area and new mines. Mount Pleasant 2018, United Wambo 2019, Mangoola expansion 2014. This has resulted in the introduction of hundreds more off-road diesel engines over this decade and over that period local councils in Muswellbrook and Singleton have both conducted community
- 30 wood smoke reduction programs.

- In 2015 more action - sorry, is required regarding off-road diesel emissions. In 2015 an EPS study identified off-road diesel emissions as the third biggest primary contributor of PM2.5 in the Hunter and attributed 95 per cent of this off-road diesel emissions to emissions from coalmining. That report was published seven years ago and I've included a link to that, Commissioners. At 21 million tonnes run-of-mine, MACH would be burning 120 million litres of diesel every year according to MACH's own EIS greenhouse gas assessment. The mining industry in the Hunter in 2015 burns more than 700 million litres a year and today I suggest that number's probably closer
- 40 to a billion litres a year.

There are still no emission standards mandated by the government or regulators for off-road diesel engines. The US has had this since the 1990s. There are no pollution reduction program requirements for off-road diesel engines - emissions in any New South Wales environmental licence at present and sadly MACH makes no proactive commitment regarding diesel emissions reductions on this project proposal. On off-road diesel emissions more action is required more quickly. The DPE has a couple of recommended conditions but they're not sufficient. Their first condition would only capture new non-road mobile diesel equipment and make sure it has diesel emissions technology. That condition should require the mine operator to have all diesel  
10 equipment fitted with the latest emission technology by a deadline date. This gets rid of old equipment and also captures non-mobile diesel engines.

The second condition regarding capturing emissions only looks at mobile equipment again and that condition should be changed to capture all large diesel mine equipment like excavators, dozers, drills, loaders, pumps, lighting plants and generators. It will be much more meaningful to produce an annual aggregate of emissions compiled the fleet type and engine hours. That's the end of my presentation, Commissioners. I'm happy to take any questions.

20 MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much for that presentation, Mr White. Can I just ask you to provide those slides, if you're happy to do so, to the Commission because that may assist them in their deliberations, if you haven't already provided those to the Commission.

MR WHITE: Very happy to do so, Mr Robertson.

MR ROBERTSON: Thanks very much for your contribution. The next speaker is Mr Nick Clyde of the Lock the Gate Alliance. Mr Clyde, can you hear us?

30 MR CLYDE: I can. Good afternoon, Commissioners.

MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead. You've got 10 minutes allocated.

MR CLYDE: Fantastic. Thank you. I'm just going to share my screen. Commissioners, can you see that okay?

MR ROBERTSON: We can see that, thank you.

**<NIC CLYDE, LOCK THE GATE ALLIANCE**

40

MR CLYDE: Fantastic. Thank you. All right. So good afternoon. I'm joining you today from Gadigal Wangal country here in Sydney, and I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Commissioners, I only have time to outline a few of Lock the Gate's concerns today. Our written submission will set out the case for refusal of this mine in more detail by the end of next week. The first issue that I want to raise is air pollution. According to the ACF, Muswellbrook is the only town in New South Wales to make a list of Australia's top 10 most polluted postcodes. They identified coarse and fine particulate matter as a significant and growing health problem in Muswellbrook. We note that air pollution was the most frequently raised issue in  
10 submissions objecting to this project. As NSW Health stated plainly in their submission, there is no evidence of a threshold below which exposure to particulate matter is not associated with health effects. Commissioners, this coal expansion will increase annual PM2.5 pollution by between 9 and 23 per cent, and I echo the concerns of this previous speaker about the health impacts of that.

Touching now on water, regional communities that we work with are always worried about the impacts of new coal and gas mining on water. We note the independent expert scientific committee's concerns about this project, finding that groundwaters will not return to pre-mining levels, that there'll be a long-term increase in cumulative  
20 water take from Dartbrook and the Hunter River and that there will be a further reduction in base flow to Sandy Creek. These kinds of impacts are partly what led Muswellbrook Shire Council to submit in their submission on the EIS that there will be a permanent impact on water availability in the local catchment. And, Commissioners, this logically has an opportunity cost and Muswellbrook Shire Council point out that there'll simply be less water available for future enterprises that could benefit from access to that water.

What about the void? The previous speaker mentioned final voids as well. Well, I'd like to draw the Commission's attention to the environmental costs of allowing  
30 coalmines across the Hunter to leave final voids in the landscape. It's obviously cheaper for coal companies to leave giant holes rather than backfill them, but backfilling final voids presents an opportunity to return land to a form that supports pre-mine use, and there are obvious benefits to that. We note that one of the department's experts, Hydro Geologic, criticised the decision to discard and discount the no-void option, favouring instead the cheap alternative, leaving a big salty lake that pumps in and evaporates groundwater in perpetuity. We also note that DPE's expert found that it is unreasonable to characterise post-mining final void lake water quality as non-polluting. Commissioners, if you're minded to approve this development, and I don't think you should, but if you do, you really must insist on  
40 backfilling of the void.

What about the impact of this project on the regional economy and future economic diversification in the Hunter? Well, recent social research in the Hunter and Upper Hunter has confirmed that locals are expecting large economic changes in future. 64 per cent said responding to economic change should be treated as an urgent priority. 73 per cent said they support the establishment of a Hunter Valley authority to manage these inevitable changes. Commissioner, as most people accept that the structural decline of coal means there is an urgent need for diversification, that's partly why Lock the Gate commissioned this new report from Ernst & Young, that you can see on your screen, that painted a picture of what could be done to provide opportunities for the Hunter in a post-coal world. One of the key employment opportunities identified in this recent report was expanding the capacity of existing agriculture in the region. Commissioners, against this backdrop it makes no sense to me at all to make new planning decisions that will drive existing agricultural enterprises out of business and out of the region. The photo that you're looking at is a photo of the largest dairy remaining in the Upper Hunter, which produces almost 10 million litres of milk per annum. It's directly adjacent to the Mount Pleasant mine. The owners of this business said in their EIS submission that "The impacts of the mine on us are so significant that the owners of the Mount Pleasant mine should be required to purchase our property." So, Commissioners, who could blame them? As if dairy farming is not already hard enough, they have endless dust, noise and light pollution to cope with, and if this project is approved, that will only get worse.

Turning now to global heating. This is the latest CO<sub>2</sub> data from CSIRO's station at Cape Grim in Tasmania. Until we get to net zero globally, CO<sub>2</sub> will continue to rise and our planet will continue to heat. Approval of the Mount Pleasant expansion would be entirely consistent with ongoing and worsening global heating which, Commissioners, prompts me to ask who thinks extending this mine is a good idea? Well, lining up to say "no, it's not" are organisations including the United Nations; the International Energy Agency; 101 Nobel laureates, including the Dalai Lama; 66 per cent of Australians, who think the government should stop new coalmines; the Australian Academy of Science; even the former New South Wales Minister for Planning, who I would submit would oppose this development if the Commission were to ask him his view. He said at the end of last year "The NSW Government recognises the need for urgent and deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions." So who is it that thinks it's a good idea? Well, principally an Indonesian-owned coalminer called MACH Energy and what I would say is a handful only of people at the NSW Department of Planning.

What about cumulative impacts, Commissioners? Well, the ongoing expansion of the coal industry in New South Wales does have consequences. Since the Paris Agreement came into force, your organisation has continued to approve new coal and

gas projects. Those new scope 1 production emissions alone from recent approvals now amount to about an extra 6 million tonnes per annum, and that is just getting the coal and gas out of the ground. That's not even burning those fossil fuels. Approval of this project, the largest coal expansion ever referred to the IPC, would greenlight a cumulative 2.7 gigatonnes of new lifetime emissions. That's the scale of greenhouse pollution that we are talking about, and this single project would add an enormous amount to that tally. Commissioners, this mine, according to the clean energy regulator's data, is already the fifth most polluting coalmine in New South Wales for scope 1 emissions, and frankly it is not in the public interest to extend this damaging pollution all the way out to 2048. And we've already heard that scope 1 emissions would increase as mining hits gassier and deeper coal seams, so this will only get worse.

What about reporting? Well, MACH Energy, it's hard to comment in detail about existing mitigation at the mine that MACH Energy currently operates because they simply don't report on their scope 1 and 2 emissions to the NSW Government in their annual reviews. If you do a keyword search for "scope 1", "scope 2", "fugitives" or "diesel", you'll find zero mentions in that report.

Commissioners, reasonable and feasible measures at existing mines industry-wide simply do not work. This is the latest data from the Australian Government over the last decade, and you can see absolutely no trend whatsoever to coalmine emissions to trend downwards. They are flat and in fact would increase due to a large expansion of the industry in Queensland and New South Wales.

I'm getting towards the end of my slide pack here but, Commissioners, I've approximated the ongoing scope 1 and 2 emissions if this mine were approved. You can see they're totally unacceptable. You should not be approving this development if you were minded to do so. However, you should absolutely require 100 per cent renewable energy, which would wipe out their scope 2 emissions entirely. You should require that the vehicles fleet is electrified by 2030. You should require the elimination of all technically-avoidable methane emissions and it's completely unacceptable for there to be ongoing emissions beyond 2050 when we should already have hit net zero. So those emissions must be 100 per cent offset.

Finally, Commissioners, to underscore the case not to grant approval for this mine development I just draw your attention to news this week that the EDO and Bushfires Survivors for Climate Action will be in the Land and Environment Court to make what effectively is a common sense legal argument that approval of the Narrabri underground extension was unreasonable, it was unrationable, illogical and not in the public interest. Commissioner's those same arguments would apply even more so to

this mine proposal which is an even larger development than Narrabri underground.  
Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you for those submissions, Mr Clyde. If you'd be kind enough to provide that slide pack to the Commission, that may assist it in its deliberations and I appreciate you've said that there's a further written submission coming along which if you could provide by the 15th of July, that would be of assistance to the Commission. Thank you for your contribution. The next speaker is Marg McLean. Ms McLean, can you hear us?

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MS McLEAN: Yes, I can.

MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead. You've got five minutes allocated.

**<MARG McLEAN, HUNTER REGION RESIDENT**

MS McLEAN: Thank you. Hello, Commissioners. Good afternoon, Commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective on the implications of approval of Mount Pleasant coalmine continuing to operate for another 22 years with  
20 double the current annual output of coal. I've lived in the Hunter region north of Singleton for over 30 years and in the many submissions on proposed developments that I have made over that time I've argued that the due consideration of the public interest must include the broad complex, social and environment cost.

I've tried to argue then against decision-making confined by a mindset that the wheels of industry must be kept turning than the determining aspect of the public interest as a viable economy at any cost. I ask you to take a step back to consider that in these unprecedented times of being confronted with a chaotic climate your decision-making must consider what acting in the public interest actually is, that it must be re-  
30 evaluated. It's becoming increasingly obvious every day that the bottom line for decision-making in the public interest must be with respect to climate change and the more frequent extreme weather events that global heating precipitates.

I contend that we need to approach the decision-making from the point of view that it's not about - really - not really about weighing up perceived competing interests but, rather, what is the limiting case. Clearly a stable economy relies upon a stable environment which all turns on a safe climate. It's seems clear to me but I am concerned that the IPC struggles with perceived public interest. I understand that there's no rule book on the public interest and that there's been a perversion over time  
40 of the application of the principles of ecologically sustainable development but the need for intergenerational equity is unequivocal. The public interest cannot just be

confined to the considerations of the current community of the Hunter Valley or New South Wales even. Reasonable decision-making by the IPC must take into account the scientific consensus on climate change and the trajectory we are on with global heating.

I submit to you, the Independent Planning Commission, that you most properly need to use the global carbon budget as your primary reference point for decision-making in the public interest. Perhaps you would consider that this reference point is beyond your jurisdiction. For instance, I imagine you say the scope 3 greenhouse gas  
10 emissions are not accounted for in Australia's target so you do not consider them either. However, when it also a matter of the public record that the International Energy Agency issued, the clear directive made in 2021 that the world cannot afford to approve any more extract of fossil fuels if we want a chance of holding warming to 1.5 degrees. In this case I consider that the New South Wales Independent Planning Commission cannot reasonably approve this Mount Pleasant mine expansion project.

It's clearly not in the public interest to approve the further admission of over 870 million more tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent greenhouse gases when the imperative is to cut the emissions. The Australian share of the global carbon budget  
20 was calculated by the government's own climate change authority in 2014. Its figure is 0.97 per cent. To put it together with demeaning our Paris commitments Australia needs to cut emissions by at least 50 per cent of 2005 levels by 2030 and reach net zero by 2045. The Climate Targets Panel report in October last year estimates that Australia has over three and a half thousand million tonnes of greenhouse gases left to burn of our share of the global budget. We've been creating around 500 million tonnes per year.

Given current and pending fossil fuel project approvals we have already effectively spent our share. I submit that the IPC cannot reasonably approve the proposed  
30 expansion as it's not in the public interest. I ask the IPC to reject the application. I'll submit my written submission with my bibliography and further clarification and details of how I see this Mount Pleasant mine proposal is not in the public interest. Thank you for your time.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you, Ms McLean, for that contribution. Our next speaker is Michael Kelly of the Muswellbrook Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Mr Kelly, go ahead. 10 minutes has been allocated to you.

**<MICHAEL KELLY, MUSWELLBROOK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND  
40 INDUSTRY**

MR KELLY: Thank very much. Good afternoon, Commissioners, and thank you for the opportunity to address this hearing. On behalf of our 200 members the Muswellbrook Chamber of Commerce and Industry supports the optimisation of MACH Energy Australia's Mount Pleasant operation to 2048. Our chamber has supported the Mount Pleasant operation with submissions to government since the beginning of the project which was approved in 1999. We supported Modification 1 in 2011, Modification 2 in 2017 and Modification 3 in 2018. The purchase of the project by MACH Energy Australia in 2016 was welcomed by local businesses. The commencement of construction and the production of the first coal in December of 10 2018 brought immediate and significant economic benefits.

We have seen a workforce of around 380 operational people and a construction workforce of up to 350 people over the last six years. We have also seen growth in local businesses supplying labour, materials and services to MACH and their major contractors on site and in all business sectors including accommodation, retail, hospitality, consulting, trades, engineering and professional services. The chamber will make a written submission to the IPC with more detail of the benefits seen in the past and the expected benefits provided by the optimisation project.

20 Today I would like to use the limited time available to make some points and views that are held by the chamber on behalf of Muswellbrook business and more broadly in the Muswellbrook community. The Muswellbrook economy is largely dependent on the mining processing and transport of coal to provide employment and prosperity. The economic benefits of the local mining are spread throughout the Hunter region, the state and the country. The cessation of mining at Muswellbrook coal this year and the planned closure of the Mount Arthur coalmine in 2030 as well as the closure of the Liddell power station in 2023 and Bayswater power station in the 2030s is of grave concern to local businesses.

30 Despite the move to a decarbonised economy there is little evidence of the labour-intensive export industries that could match the economic input of coal in the short and medium term. The New South Wales Minerals Council forecast global demand for high quality, low emissions, low cost Hunter Valley coal out to 2050. The professed negative impacts of mining are liveability and other industries is not supported by the continuing diversity of the Hunter economy and the demand for housing in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter generally.

Over the last six years MACH Energy, along with other major companies, has made substantial cash and in-kind contributions to Muswellbrook sporting clubs and 40 community service organisations. Our chamber has been able to support local businesses of all types with sponsorship from MACH. Our Business Award Program

and the Making Muswellbrook Program have their ongoing support. During the COVID pandemic, MACH joined with others to sponsor Locals Supporting Local and Buy Local campaigns, as well as COVID recovery workshops. These programs benefiting a wide range of businesses, but especially those in the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors.

10 MACH Energy Australia is a responsible corporate citizen and is seen as an integral part of the Muswellbrook community. The chamber will leave the environmental assessment of State Significant Development 10418 to those experts in that field. We would, however, record an observation that over the last 20 years mining companies in the Upper Hunter have taken a more holistic approach to their developments with stronger community engagement, the recognition of a transition of timing and after-mining land use. MACH Energy Mount Pleasant has demonstrated their commitment to this approach and the chamber is confident that MACH will maintain their optimisation approach. We commend the project to the IPC and look forward to your favourable determination. Thank you, and I have provided a transcript of that on email this afternoon to your office.

20 MR ROBERTSON: Thank you for that, Mr Kelly, and thank you for that contribution.

MR KELLY: Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: The next speaker is Deanne Douglas. Ms Douglas, can you hear us?

MS DOUGLAS: Yes, I can.

30 MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead. You've got five minutes allocated.

**<DEANNE DOUGLAS, WONNARUA LOCAL ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL**

MS DOUGLAS: Good afternoon. My name is Deanne Douglas. I begin today by acknowledging the Wonnarua people, traditional custodians of the land I stand on today. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I am a proud (not transcribable) woman who lives on Wonnarua land. I have lived, worked and raised a family in Muswellbrook for the past 25 years. I have worked in community focused businesses and volunteer organisations during this time. I was the manager at the  
40 Muswellbrook PCYC for 15 and a half years. I am currently the CEO with the Wonnarua Local Aboriginal Land Council. I am passionate about my culture,

community, our elders, youth and those less fortunate. Without the local mining industry, we would not have a strong, committed and stable base to undertake the work we do. I assist with transport and logistics for Aboriginal inmates from St Heliers Correctional Centre who work at the Mount Pleasant operation and other local mines. I know MACH Energy works hard in the community and supports so many local businesses through their local buying policy. Our local businesses need this support to support their families and assist community groups. When I need volunteers, MACH Energy are always the first to put their hands up to help. This supports so many people and organisations in our community who need volunteers to do the work they do. I want to see Mount Pleasant continue past 2026 because I am local. I know the issues and I know how much MACH cares about what they are doing and how they are doing it. Their commitment to addressing community complaints and issues is to be applauded. They are the best at what they do every day. MACH Energy train and employ Aboriginal people in roles throughout the mine, which gives our people opportunities and the employment security that we need. Over the next few days you will hear from people speaking against this project. Most of these people do not live in our community. I do. Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you, Ms Douglas for that contribution. The next speaker is Dr Bob Vickers. Dr Vickers, can you hear me?

DR VICKERS: Yeah, I can, sorry. I thought we had one more before me, sorry.

MR ROBERTSON: No, you're next up, Dr Vickers. Please go ahead. 10 minutes has been allocated for you.

**<DR BOB VICKERS, SINGLETON GP**

DR VICKERS: Not a problem. Good afternoon and Commissioners, and I'm actually going to a more detailed acknowledgement of country today because it's NAIDOC Week and its theme is "Stand up! Show up!". And I do, I've heard others acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and pay respect to Elders past and present, and I find the authenticity of this version, it's usually quite lacking, because despite the gains made for self-determination and guardianship of First Nations communities, there are ongoing failures that mirror those which continue to damage our health and environment. There is this false belief that social mobility for First Nations people is possible if we just make more jobs, and there's this tokenism of praising a handful of young Indigenous people who are lucky enough to gain employment in mining, and that fails to deliver meaningful long-term gains and results. At the 2021 Census, so I'm not using anecdotal, the 2021 Census, tertiary education rates and median incomes remain lower for First Nations Australians in

Muswellbrook compared to non-Indigenous Australians. The local Aboriginal corporations receive funding from the mining companies and are then sources of insecure labour hire work and training in industries that do not have a future. So companies such as BHP, MACH Energy and Glencore all fit this model. Traditional custodians have protected this country for thousands of years, and as per the NSW Department of Planning, the NSW Government is committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2020 to make our state more sustainable and resilient to a changing climate. The consistent recommendations, though, of approving further coalmines from the department, so that there's actually no accountability to this commitment, nor respect for the custodians that manage this land. The Uluru Statement from the Heart proposes three elements of reform: voice, treaty and truth.

Voice. The silencing of First Nations voices, it speaks to the disrespect of current custodians. I've listened to many First Nations voices in this community. I was born and I grew up in this community and I continue to practise medicine here. They aren't financially benefiting from mining. This is the other voices. Their truth is silenced by these enterprises and a lot of the local media. They speak of heritage and are met with a full-page defamation from the mining industry in the newspaper. They speak of ill health and no one supports them, despite all the money coming into the community apparently. Asthma rates for First Nations Australians in Muswellbrook - Muswellbrook's bad, it's 7 per cent higher if you're Indigenous. The health outcomes of the Muswellbrook community are already poor because of the negative impacts of mining on our air quality.

Truth. Both MACH Energy and Glencore provide funding to our local Aboriginal medical corporations and land councils. These Aboriginal corporations were established to provide heritage assessments for mining projects and for years have done so with no criticism of conflict of interest. At the last IPC meeting I spoke at was the Glencore Glendell Continued Operations hearing. That was March 18<sup>th</sup> this year. At the time I was providing contracted health services to a local Aboriginal medical corporation. 10 days after the Glendell IPC meeting, the board of the Ungooroo Aboriginal Corporation sent me correspondence that was in breach of my contract for health services and I have since ceased contractual services for them in April. I'm going to quote directly from the NSW Government Legislative Council's Economic Development in Aboriginal Communities discussion paper from 2016. This was after an extensive review. This is a fantastic quote. "Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation use offsets, negotiated with private companies or government, for loss or destruction of cultural land and heritage to access capital." That's the problem. That isn't treaty.

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So that's my acknowledgement of country, and I'm going to go on and talk about the Department of Planning's recommendations. I've been speaking for many years now to the IPC about the negative health impacts of air pollution. The evidence of death and disease attributable to air pollution continues to mount. And I've included in my supplementary material, I sent that a few days ago to show recent data on the mortality from PM2.5, the excess asthma burden from sulphur dioxide pollution, exposure to high levels of fine particulate nitrous oxides and ozone have now been shown to increase the risk of hospitalisation, ICU admission and death from COVID-19, which is now arguably the world's leading cause of mortality and Australia's as well, even when levels of pollution are low. I haven't seen a single condition of consent recommended from the Department of Planning or any determination from the IPC that has led to any air quality improvements or health improvements. The coal industry in this region is the predominant source of this pollution. The industry and the approvals process are failing to protect our health and environment. The Department of Planning states for this project that the air quality impacts are acceptable and that MACH has proposed all reasonable and feasible measures to reduce these impacts as far as practicable.

On whose behalf does the department accept that the impacts of air pollution are acceptable? 'Cause they're not breathing my air, they're not breathing Muswellbrook's air. So on whose behalf do they make that statement? I saw the independent review. It's lovely. I quote, it found it "initially identified a number of information gaps and technical issues in MACH Energy's air quality assessment". This is the first time I've seen a peer review of Todoroski Air Science or a proponent's air quality assessment from the department, and it seriously concerns me about what you've already approved. The review mentions that from Todoroski it was unable to provide (not transcribable) to substantiate claims, providing figures where the resolution was too poor to read and that Todoroski uses methodology which is a deviation from the approved (not transcribable). The department assume without any substantiating evidence that cumulative air impacts were raised in a large number of submissions on the project and it's expected that these relate to short term 24-hour impacts. That's false, there's no evidence to that statement. It's a deliberate attempt to draw away from the unacceptable annual average PM2.5 that all of Muswellbrook experiences, not just sensitive receivers and from the peer review of the air quality assessment the methodology for assigning the residual background of annual average PM2.5 is not considered appropriate.

What's acceptable? Given the substantial concerns raised from the peer review process there are serious questions about the department's subsequent assessment of economic benefits because there are uncalculated health costs. There's large potential for unmeasured environmental costs. Todoroski has consistently been the choice of

assessors for all mining projects since I've been presenting to the IPC and from what I can see for a very long time it's hard - not hard to see why really. We no longer trust any prior cumulative impact statements. We need to cease all approvals. The department needs to undertake an independent peer review of all previous assessment completed by Todoroski in this LGA because this process has removed merits appeal. So where is an acceptable approval on merit when that's the standard we are given?

10 On the social determinants of health, the department claims a myriad of contradictions. They say the positive and social and economic impacts are increased employment and economic opportunities but then they use data from 2020 to claim that in the short to medium term there will be strong global demand for thermal coal. The Minerals Council is not a particularly reliable to trustworthy on that and it's outdated. The COP 26 last year had a global coal to clean power transition statement, many more countries and financial institutions have removed support or plans for investment in coal. In the last six years there's been a thousand gigawatts of planned new coal plants cancelled across the world.

20 The region needs clean air, healthier people and a cleaner environment. We need an economy that is secure for employment. The IPC must decide to protect the region from the already harmful air quality and approval should not be given. Whilst the Department of Planning and coalmining companies are still trying to use net zero by 2050 as an excuse to do nothing for 30 years, the science is actually irrefutable and I assume one of them have read the IPC's sixth assessment. I've included in my written submission to ensure that you have. Nature, the journal Nature, published last year of growing consensus from climate scientists that staying under 1.5 degrees is looking unlikely. This net zero by 2050 to stay under 1.5 it's political spin at this point, it is not science.

30 We've already locked in warlike destruction. We must do everything possible to avoid our tipping point cascades that are going to lead to a hot house earth because that is inhabitable for most species. When scientists refer to business as usual leading to three degrees or warming or more they're not just talking about Glencore, they're not just talking about BHP, they're talking about this, the IPC, the Department of Planning, Todoroski Air Sciences, people coming in saying but the jobs and the economy are great. This process assumes that everyone in this process has an understanding of the science. If that's the case, I expect nothing less than to see each and every Commissioner from the IPC, all of their staff members, all of the staff members from the Department of Planning standing beside Extinction Rebellion marching in protest. It's time that you stand up and it's time that you show up. Thank  
40 you.

PROF. FELL: Dr Vickers, thanks. Are the national environmental protection measures for particulates a reasonable basis to make assessment on the health impacts of air pollution.

DR VICKERS: There are no known health impacts. Sorry, there are no known safe limits of air pollution. It's like saying I'm going to give this kid a pack of cigarettes but if they don't go to hospital and they don't develop lung cancer in 40 years it was probably fine. We have a cumulative exposure burden for every health impact of air pollution. The more you are exposed to, the greater the damage. So these arbitrary  
10 NEPM limits are what is a socially-acceptable construct for we're making this pollution and who doesn't want to stop making this pollution and so that set a limit, that's kind of a balance between those parties. It's - - -

PROF. FELL: Can I take it then your answer is - - -

DR VICKERS: - - - (not transcribable) to make their own pollution - - -

PROF. FELL: Sorry. Can I take it then your answer is no, NEPM are not a  
20 satisfactory - - -

DR VICKERS: Not at all. And by the time this life of this mine has completed, if it's approved, then NEPM criteria will likely be restricted two, three, 10 times more. If you look at past history of restrictions and improvements to the NEPM criteria there is nothing to suggest that it would not be tightened further as we gain more data on the health impacts of air pollution.

PROF. FELL: Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you for that assistance, Dr Vickers. The next speaker is  
30 Amber Wright. Ms Wright, can you hear me?

MS WRIGHT: Yes, yes. Can you hear me?

MR ROBERTSON: Yes. Please go ahead. You've got five minutes allocated.

**<AMBER WRIGHT, MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE RESIDENT**

MS WRIGHT: Thank you. Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to  
40 speak at this hearing. My name is Amber Wright and today I'm here to show my support for the optimisation of MACH Energy Mount Pleasant operation to 2048. I am here to represent myself today as a local resident of the Muswellbrook Shire which

is where I was born and raised and where I currently reside. I support the optimisation of MACH Energy Mount Pleasant operation to 2048 because I believe this project will be beneficial for the local area. This project will provide continuation of employment and create more jobs for locals, continuation of support for the local supply chain and ongoing operating expenditure and ongoing support for local community groups.

10 It is evident that MACH Energy Mount Pleasant operations are essential contributors to our community. They have established strong relationships with local suppliers and the local business community and uphold a local recruitment strategy to ensure they engage and hire local talent. The collaboration between MACH Energy Mount Pleasant operations and the community has a positive objective in creating security for their employees and support for the local businesses and suppliers. Currently MACH Energy Mount Pleasant operations have an average workforce of 330 people. This project has the potential to increase their workforce to an average of 600 to 800 people.

20 This means this optimisation project alone has the potential to provide job security for up to 800 people. After the announcement of BHP Mount Arthur's closure the potential establishment of such a large workforce opportunity is very welcomed. With the site of MACH Energy Mount Pleasant operations being located in a regional rural area offering such a large scale workforce will deliver significant economic and socioeconomic benefits to local communities. This creates a domino effect for the local area including increased employment, an increase in the housing market, increased support for local business including our local pubs and clubs and an increase in social capital.

30 This is significant because it is not only their direct workforce contributing to the community but also their families and friends. Local businesses are then able to enjoy the benefits of increased expenditure and capital is invested back into the community. I understand that there is some concern about adverse environmental impacts this project might have, this is warranted and I am confident that together with current technologies MACH Energy Mount Pleasant operations will ensure they have appropriate measures in place to reduce their impact on the environments. In summary, the optimisation of MACH Energy Mount Pleasant operation till 2048 will be beneficial to our local community because it will create more jobs, continue to support our local businesses and maintain support for our local supply chain. In conclusion, I support the optimisation of MACH Energy Mount Pleasant operation to 2048 because they have, and continue to support me and my local community. Thank you.

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MR ROBERTSON: Thank you, Ms Wright. Commissioners, I propose to ask the next witness to speak at 2.45pm.

MS WRIGHT: Thank you.

**SHORT ADJOURNMENT**

**[1.59pm]**

MR ROBERTSON: Commissioners, the next speaker is Robert Monteath of the Cheaper Electricity Party. Mr Monteath, can you hear us?

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MR MONTEATH: Yes, I can. Thank you, I've just got to share my screen.

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, thank you. We can hear you, and 15 minutes has been allocated to you, and we can now see your screen.

**<ROBERT MONTEATH, CHEAPER ELECTRICITY PARTY**

MR MONTEATH: Thank you. Commissioners, thanks for the opportunity to speak to you on this project. I'm just trying to get my arrow going so I can point at a few things. I've (not transcribable) Mount Pleasant's coal is in demand. Who wants it? Well, the burgeoning Asian market wants our coal, Mount Pleasant's coal, Australia's coal. And the reason for that is, is that there is a plan, a map showing that they're, Asia's building 600 coal-fired power plants at the moment. The pink and the purple circles represent where they're being built and they're going to have a generation capacity of 500,000 megawatts. And in comparison, Australia's capacity is 25,000 megawatts for our coal-fired power stations. And this is an Australian graph showing the increase in Australian imports of coal over the last 10 years, and they've grown threefold, including Mount Pleasant's coal. On a recent trip to (not transcribable) our Prime Minister said that Indonesia experienced incredible economic growth and it will soon become the fifth-largest economy in the world. But what is facilitating Indonesia's economic growth? Well, a reliable supply of electricity. That's what you need for good economic growth. And according to the International Energy Agency's graph, Indonesia's electricity consumption has increased sixfold in the last 30 years, and coal generates 60 per cent of its electricity and collectively fossil fuels generate 85 per cent. And in the last year, Indonesia built 6 per cent of the world's coal power stations. We see China's got the big majority, 56 per cent. Another Asian report suggests that Indonesia's got a program to build a further 100 power stations. Even though they generate, they mine their own coal, they'll still be needing, requiring Australia's coal to fuel all these power stations. And by comparison, Australia has 19 coal-fired power stations. Indonesia is the world's seventh largest consumer of coal and will soon become the fifth largest economy, so successful modern economies need

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reliable base load supply of electricity. Six out of the 10 top coal-consuming countries are in Asia, so they need Mount Pleasant's coal.

So looking at that, can a modern economy currently survive without base load power and rely totally on renewables, which a lot of the world would like to think can happen? Unfortunately, not for the foreseeable future. Maybe sometime in the second half of this century. How is the transition to renewable power going? Unfortunately, it's not going very well. Referring again to the International Energy Agency's graphs. Asia, well, I'm talking about Asia, so let's start looking at Asia. In 30 years, wind and solar percentage has gone from 0.5 per cent to 5 per cent, so it's still negligible. Europe claims to be the renewable capital of the world. Over that 30-year period it's gone from 0 per cent to 15 per cent but is still very small. And the claim or goal for net zero emissions by 2050 seems unlikely.

So there are, and in particularly in Europe, there's a changing attitude to coal, mainly due to the war in Ukraine, but there is a report saying the Czech Republic, UK, Germany and Portugal, amongst other countries, are going to prolong or restart their coal-fired power stations. This is due to necessity because after 30 years of building renewables, Europe still relies heavily on fossil fuels. And even the case in Australia. This is an article from today's Newcastle Herald. There's a loss of confidence due to the threat of blackouts and electricity price hikes, and now 90 per cent of Australians believe that electricity will become unaffordable for the next three years, and this is of great, should be of great concern to all Australians. There's a poll that was taken a few weeks ago that Australians are causing for a pause on our net zero policy. 61 per cent of people polled agree that we should pause our net zero emissions policy which is the same as has happened in the United Kingdom. Media report from yesterday saying that coal's making a comeback because there's an energy drought and again because of Russia's war in Ukraine but coal is filling the void left by Russian gas and it's filling that void because wind and solar can't do that and looking at the world's generation of sources of generation for electricity, wind and solar were zero 30 years ago, now in the world it is seven per cent and it's worth noting that coal's percentage hasn't changed in 30 years. So, you know, like it or not the world still needs coal for its electricity needs.

Here's a report from energy monitor showing that our coal consumption is at a record high. (not transcribable) looking at Australia's electricity generation over 30 years we've gone from nought to 15 per cent which is similar to Europe but we've still got a long way to go before we can rely heavily on wind and solar to generate our electricity. So when we see media headlines like this, renewable energy can power Australia's energy system reliably without coal or nuclear. They're not quite true yet, they could be true in many years to come but unfortunately there's many media outlets

and a lot of politicians that believe this but it is misleading to say the least and why is it misleading? Because when you look closely at the facts - this is from the Australian Government's reports - the top one is from the '18/'19 report showing that renewables for all of our energy, not just electricity but for electricity for electricity - energy for electricity transport, manufacturing, heating 6.4 per cent of this energy was generated by renewables and a year later that 6.5 per cent went to seven per cent. So it's a very minor growth and it will take years before renewables become dominant.

10 We've spent \$35 billion on wind and solar in the last 20 years but it is a very, very slow transition and the reason for that is that wind and solar don't work 24/7, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it just can't happen. Here's a Monday night in June, over all of Australia there was very little sun and wind so that's - this is a graph showing each state colour-coded, black coal, red gas, brown coal, blue hydro, green wind, South Australia has got diesel happening in that purple and so has Queensland, they're using diesel to generate electricity which is not that efficient but four per cent of Australia's, on this night, electricity was coming from wind and solar where base load power being coal, hydro were generating 94 per cent. So it will be a long time before we can rely on wind and solar.

20 During the recent energy crisis, coal plant energies were blamed for the energy crisis saying they weren't working, they were down, they were offline due to maintenance but unfortunately the media weren't reporting what was happening with the lack of wind and here on the 28th of May, you know, five weeks or so ago, wind and solar were only generating five per cent of our electricity and for the foreseeable future we cannot rely on wind and solar, we need base load power and three weeks ago similar situation. So what will happen when our aging coalfired power stations start closing? We're going to be in big trouble and just from records from last year, a third of the nights, 106 nights in 2021 wind power was generating less than five per cent of our electricity overnight and overnight Australia consumes 300,000 megawatts of  
30 electricity so if Australia was to remove all of its fossil fuel generators we would need massive amounts of electricity stored in batteries and with a huge, huge cost, \$300 billion-plus. At the moment our biggest battery is 450 megawatts so it's not going to happen quickly.

So if people in the world and including Australians they want luxury of using electricity 24/7 then we need to keep mining coal for the next several decades at least and that's including Mount Pleasant. So many say the carbon dioxide emissions from coal plants are going to destroy the planet by causing mass extinction of flora and fauna and significant loss of human life due to rising temperatures. Well, is this really  
40 the case? According to David Attenborough on his recent Green Planet series human existence depend heavily on plentiful and healthy global plant life. Since 1990 the

amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased from 360 to 410 parts per million and CSIRO and ANU have done a research revealing that between '82 and 2010 there was 11 per cent increase of foliage in the world's arid regions as a result of increasing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

10 The NASA satellite data shows that the amount of plant and tree cover over the globe has increased by 20 million square kilometres from 1982 to 2015 as a result of the increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. So flora or fauna extinction is not really happening and apart from that the last few years Australia's had record crop harvests for wheat, maize and all the other crops so helped by a lot of rain but also by the carbon dioxide in the air. Also human deaths caused by rising temperatures. There was a report done last year by Monash University or a study done, should I say, that shows that worldwide each year 4.6 million deaths are due to cold weather where a tenth of that or 480,000 deaths are due to hot weather.

20 So more people die from cold than heat. So is carbon dioxide the only cause of rising temperatures? What about the sun? So here's a graph showing sun's activity of flares and sun spots over the last thousand years and looking back in the 1700s it was at its lowest and there was a mini ice age and the Thames River used to freeze over each winter as well as other rivers in - or seas in Europe and now look at the sun's activity since 1900, it's been on the way up and surprise, surprise the earth's temperatures have been increasing for all that period. We acknowledge that the greenhouse gases emissions by humans could have an effect but the sun is still the dominant force of our climate, and here's a graph from Dr Patrick Moore, who's a co-founder of Greenpeace, showing that there is no correlation between the change in CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the atmosphere, purple, as distinct from, blue, temperatures. So CO<sub>2</sub> has been flat for the last million-plus years but the temperature has gone up and down like a yo-yo.

30 So there's no such thing as clean reliable energy unfortunately. Like it or not Australia needs to give its coal industry going for the foreseeable future. I believe that the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project needs to be approved. Thank you. Do you have any questions?

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you, Mr Monteath. If you wouldn't mind providing that slideshow to the Commission if you haven't done so already, that may be of assistance to the Commission.

40 MR MONTEATH: I will. I haven't as yet but I will. I'll put it in as a PDF. Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you. The next speaker is Mr Steven Edwards. Mr Edwards, can you hear us? Mr Edwards, can you hear us?

MR EDWARDS: I can hear you. Can you hear me?

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, we can hear you now. Please go ahead. Five minutes has been set aside for you.

**<STEVEN EDWARDS, BLACKROCK INDUSTRIES**

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MR EDWARDS: Yeah, I'm just speaking from my personal opinion. I moved my family, my wife and my two children from Sydney to the Hunter region not working and not knowing anything. I moved up here, I got a start with a company that was working on the (not transcribable) Creek project at Mount Pleasant. Once that had been completed and finished, I (not transcribable) Blackrock Industries and that was gone from just myself working there to my wife, both my two children. And love, love the industry, love Mount Pleasant and think that it should stay onboard. Yeah, I haven't really got much to say other than it's helped my whole family move from Sydney not knowing anything about the industry, and look forward to staying there.

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MR ROBERTSON: Thanks very much for that contribution, Mr Edwards. The next speaker is Tony O'Driscoll. Mr O'Driscoll, can you hear us?

MR O'DRISCOLL: Mute. Yes, I can.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you, please go ahead. Five minutes has been allocated for you.

**<TONY O'DRISCOLL, NEWGATE GROUP**

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MR O'DRISCOLL: Thank you. Good afternoon, Commissioners. My name is Tony O'Driscoll. I am the Chief Financial Officer of the Newgate Group and am representing Newgate owners. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. I'd also like to pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. Newgate runs a thoroughbred breeding operation here in the Hunter Valley and was founded in 2010 when it originally operated as a brood mare agistment farm on 250 acres. It stood its first stallion in 2012, and this year we will stand 13 stallions with a value in excess of \$140 million. These stallions will cover over 1,600 mares this year. Today

40 Newgate is one of the major Australian thoroughbred breeding operations with 1,700 acres of prime Hunter Valley land and is a major force in the domestic and

international thoroughbred breeding industries. In the last 12 months we employed just under 100 staff, a number of which live on our property and will be directly impacted by this mine extension.

I can confidently say that open-cut coalmining and thoroughbred breeding cannot co-exist in close proximity. The Hunter Valley is one of only three centres of thoroughbred excellence in the world. The vertical integration that exists in the Hunter provides enormous benefits to all the breeders and breeding operations and the local and state economies. Just like mining, we have many businesses that rely on our industry to earn a living. These include feed producers, local tradespeople, vets, farriers and horse transport companies, local car dealers and machinery suppliers, local businesses such as catering and accommodation and event companies, and there are many other suppliers and businesses. Reputation is critical to our business and industry. Having a mine of this size and scope so close to important farms such as Newgate, Godolphin, Yarraman Park and others will impact our business, our brand and affect investment in our industry.

We have hundreds of clients and potential clients that visit our farm every year. This mine and the effects of this mine will be clearly visible from the viewing area where we take clients and visitors to see our farm and surrounding area. Its effects will also be seen by all those that travel along the New England Highway. There is a real chance that our clients may elect to move their horses elsewhere, where they will not be exposed to the dust, noise and visual impacts of this mine. Perception, whether real or imagined, is reality for many people. Particularly those who operate in our industry. New investment over the last five to 10 years has gone to Victoria and Queensland because of the uncertainty that exists in the Hunter Valley due to the ever-growing creep of the mining industry. The Hunter's equine critical industry cluster is meant to be afforded heightened protection, particularly in the State Significant Development Assessment process. How can you make an informed decision on this project when the impacts on our industry, the largest agricultural industry in the region, have not been assessed. I urge you to come and see what we have here in the Hunter, why it is so important, why we cannot co-exist in close proximity to open-cut coalmining and why we should be protected from it.

We have many concerns about the impact this proposal will have on our air quality, water security, the social fabric of our towns and our scenic landscape, which is vital to our operations, our brand and reputation. I would like to address the importance of having a fulsome cumulative impact assessment undertaken to guide your decision-making on this project. Procurement of impacts of noise, dust, air quality, water and visual amenity caused by mining have not been comprehensively assessed for this area of the Upper Hunter in the past two decades. Each new mine modification is

considered on a standalone basis, with no consideration to the real cumulative impacts. In the last 20-plus years there have been a number of significant changes to the mining landscape in our region, including the Bengalla mine, which commenced in 1998, and has been modified and expanded many times. The Mangoola open-cut coalmine, which commenced in 2010, has also been modified and expanded many times. The Mount Arthur open-cut coal mine has also had many modifications, increasing its footprint. The Mount Pleasant open-cut mine commenced in 2018 after an 18-year hiatus. Has the tipping point been reached or exceeded in the Hunter? The problem is that no one knows, but given the growth in mining projects over the last 20 years, it is highly likely that it has, and industries and communities like ours are suffering the consequences. I urge you to commission a comprehensive cumulative impact assessment to be conducted by an independent party before you make a decision on this project. Without this information, I cannot see how an informed decision that is in the public interest can be made.

In conclusion, the thoroughbred industry in the Hunter Valley is a sustainable industry and has been here for over 200 years and will be here for another 200 years. Mining will not. We need it to be protected. It confounds the owners of Newgate as to why the thoroughbred industry in the Hunter Valley, which is considered as one of the best in the world, is continually put at risk by coalmining and is not protected like the other major breeding centres around the world. Before you make a decision, I urge you to please, one, commission a cumulative impact assessment on the impacts of all the mining projects in this area, including this Mount Pleasant project, and come and visit the thoroughbred industry in the Hunter Valley so you can get an understanding of our industry and how this mine will impact us. Thank you very much.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you for that contribution, Mr O'Driscoll. Professor Fell I think has a question for you.

PROF. FELL: Mr O'Driscoll, thank you for your presentation. I just wonder where Newgate is geographically with respect to Mount Pleasant.

MR O'DRISCOLL: We're, we're about eight kilometres from Mount Pleasant and we are to the east.

PROF. FELL: Thanks very much.

MR O'DRISCOLL: As you come, as you drive through Muswellbrook to Aberdeen, Mount Pleasant will be on the left-hand side of the road. When you get to Aberdeen you turn right and our farm is about five kilometres from Aberdeen.

PROF. FELL: Thank you.

MR BAILEY: So just to clarify, Mr O'Driscoll, I think to the north-east?

MR O'DRISCOLL: North-east, yes. I think I've got that right.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you, Mr O'Driscoll. Is there any further questions from the panel? We might move to the next speaker, then. Next speaker is Mr Steve Fordham. Mr Fordham, can you hear us?

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MR FORDHAM: Can you hear me?

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, we can. Please go ahead. 10 minutes has been allocated for you.

**<STEVEN FORDHAM, BLACKROCK INDUSTRIES**

MR FORDHAM: All right, awesome. Look, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak at today's PAC. I think if anyone could actually speak on behalf of MACH Energy and Mount Pleasant, it would be myself. I was actually the first person inducted into the mine site, first company to win a contract, and I've been out there since day one. To give you a bit of my background, I'm a young entrepreneur, I'm 30 years old, and I started at Mount Pleasant when I was about 25 years old. MACH is different. I know one thing we've looked at today with all the people that have spoken against mining per se, but I think people have got to take every mine as a case-by-case basis and what that has actually done for the Hunter Valley and for different communities. And MACH to me is a different organisation in comparison. So when I first started out with a goal to try and get a local business in the area, it's hard, it's tough. You take a lot of risks, you take a, looking for a lot of reward, but it's trying to get that opportunity to somehow progress. When I met with MACH Energy, I didn't meet with some community liaison, I actually met with the Managing Director. First day they got in and they said, "We, our whole point of what we want this organisation to be is different. We want to be able to meet with locals, we want locals to know who we are from the top all the way down to the bottom." I managed to get my first opportunity. As I said, I started with 20 grand and a little tipper. I remember actually getting home to my partner at the time and said, "Look, I don't know how to tell you, I spent our life savings." She goes, "I didn't know we had life savings." And I said, "If I told you we had life savings, we wouldn't have the, we wouldn't have them."

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But essentially what we did is we kicked off, we met with MACH, we got our first opportunity, and the big thing what we wanted to do is separate ourselves from the rest. We want to provide opportunities for our mob. Being a Kamilaroi man, part of the big things that I want to see is opportunities, and the mining sector has a large amount of them. What not many people know, the second-largest employer for Aboriginal people is the mining sector, and MACH Energy have gone above and beyond to make that into their workforce and, and to make that as a continuing process that will happen with this extension. We met with MACH. We managed to get our first start with a little \$1,000 tender. Since then we've grown the business and it was about 2.8 million our first year, and expanded out across the site. The one thing that set MACH apart from the rest is it's not just about giving anyone an opportunity, it's about finding the people that normally don't get those opportunities, and I know that's what I've heard a lot today, that people have said, "MACH haven't done that," but they actually have. We started a little program called Second Chance for Change, and it actually started with MACH's thoughts and their process to help us to actually get that dream alive. And essentially what it was, we met with a candidate that was funded through the ACDF, which MACH puts hundreds of thousands of dollars back in the community every year, and we met this candidate that went through, and this guy is six months out of prison, he's had no opportunity, no way to progress, heaps of barriers, and MACH actually turned around and said, look, can we give this guy an opportunity and essentially we reached out and we've done that. Sorry, I don't know why that screen's popped up that way. Yeah. So we gave this guy an opportunity and it was about two weeks into his employment I was driving down the main street, I seen this guy walking, orange work shirt, blue jeans, work boots, glove clip hanging on the side, and I pulled up and said, why are you wearing your work gear on a Sunday and he went quiet, he said, wearing this uniform gives me an opportunity. He said, I don't go in a shop, old people don't hold their handbags and I don't get followed around. He said, I look at - people look at me and they actually smile. He said, I've actually had a chance to actually progress in life.

Since then we've now at 111 incarcerated men through our local prison that get to go out of work everyday, get an opportunity like everyone else and a pathway to progress and out of 11 guys 75 of those people have worked on Mount Pleasant's site. 75. Our mob normally 88 out of every hundred are back in gaol within two years. Our return to incarceration is four out of 111. So that shows you that this program actual work and the dedication and the opportunity that MACH has given us to expand our path forward into something so much more. We're normally looked at as an tokenistic gesture. MACH has taken that away, they've actually given us the chance to have a voice, have an opportunity and have a progress.

At the age of 25 I actually decided to take my own life. I went through a massive amount of depression. MACH turned around and gave me the opportunity for Mount Pleasant. It saved my life, it saved my community and it's helped grow our community into a pathway forward. We don't want to go to Sydney when these pits are gone. We don't want to look going out of the area, we want to stay in this town but the only way we can keep the jobs at the moment is the mining sector and it's organisations like Mount Pleasant that go above and beyond everyday to give us that voice and give us that chance. It's all the little businesses, and I know we talk about shutting the big coalmines and knocking the big guy out but it's the little guys like us that are out there everyday that get the opportunities through this mine site that help us progress.

It's the bakery on the morning when the guys are stopping to get a sausage roll, it's the fuel station, it's the small little businesses, it's the dad being able to go to work everyday, turn around and provide for his family and give his daughter a chance to go to ballet, his son to go play football and to all those things. This pit is so much more than just a mining company. It is our livelihood, this is our dream and it's who this town is and MACH Energy goes above and beyond everyday to make that apparent. I know when we lost Drayton through the decisions having the PAC, and I'm not holding that against anyone, our town suffered so hard because of that and to have Mount Pleasant was the shining light at the end of the tunnel that helped so many small businesses stay in the area and still function with the dreams that we have to be a part of this economy and part of this dream.

MACH go above everyday, everything and I could not thank them enough, through Ngaire Baker, who every time if there's any little issue in the community all they've got to do is reach out, she's the first person to pick a phone up and the first person to intervene to make sure that problem's fixed. All I've heard today is negativity and it's the same people that come to every PAC to turn around and try and pull down these mining operations and try and hit everyone with the same stick. Well, I don't think that's right. I think it's time that we turn around and we have a look at this case by case by basis and it's the way in which it should be and to turn around and know exactly what this pit has actually done for this community because it's one of the few that go above and beyond everyday and it's just everything.

I'm sorry, I'm lost for words, I'm all over the place but I'm passionate about this because I'm passionate about this opportunity of what we've got going forward. This extension is not just an extension of Mount Pleasant, it's an extension of Blackrock, it's an extension of all the little businesses that we've spoken today, Matty Stair, Eddie Trailer who couldn't come today because he had Covid but all these little businesses that got an opportunity to go forward if this mine goes forward and that's what it's

about. It's the locals, it's who we are and it's what we need. I might pull up there, sorry, I'm just a little bit shaky but, yeah. Any questions?

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much for that contribution, Mr Fordham. Our next speaker is Lavinia Hutchison. Ms Hutchison, can you hear us?

MS HUTCHISON: Yes, I can.

MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead. Five minutes have been allocated for you.

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**<LAVINIA HUTCHISON, MUSWELLBROOK BUSINESS OWNER**

MS HUTCHISON: Thank you. Good afternoon, Commissioner. My name is Lavinia Hutchison and I'm a local business owner here in Muswellbrook. I am speaking in favour of Mount Pleasant operation, extending the life of its open-cut mining operations to 2048. I have worked closely with local businesses, predominantly those in the mining supply chain here in the Upper Hunter and in the Bowen Basin for almost two decades and I work with businesses to market their services and have done so during cyclical industry upturns and downturns and I am still working with businesses and community organisations in Muswellbrook, Singleton and Scone today who are proactively seeking opportunities in and from our local mines including Mount Pleasant operation.

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I have significant experience and expertise working with local businesses and I'm often their first point of contact when it comes to discussions around diversification of their services and marketing themselves to other industries. The uncertainty around the future of mining and the lack of attainable opportunities outside of the sector is causing angst. I am not aware of any accessible pathways or programs to enable our businesses to realistically shift their reliance or focus from mining. I believe we should be working alongside mining and utilise the industry to our benefit. There is no comparison or planned replacement of the economic input coal provides and Mount Pleasant operation alone provides significant job security and financial support to local businesses and community organisations across the entire Upper Hunter.

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Local businesses support diversification and they actually use their current contracts to provide them with the security and cash flow to pursue innovation and new opportunities and they need time to do so past 2026. Overall considerations. Muswellbrook Coal is due to close later this year after 100-plus years resulting in 150 job losses. Mount Arthur Coal recently announced their plant closure in 2026, possibly 2030, resulting in 2000-plus direct and indirect job losses. Hunter Valley operations tenement is to 2025 and they support 1,240-plus employees and contractors

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and then, of course, the plant closure of Liddell and Bayswater power stations between 2023 and 2030.

Collectively, these impacts are of great concern and the continuation of Mount Pleasant operation would ultimately reduce the impact of overall job losses and direct financial impact not only in Muswellbrook but across the Hunter Valley. The future of Mount Pleasant operation will provide 300-plus jobs, continued financial input into our community which was critical during Covid and significant coal royalties which benefit the state. I vividly recall speaking with a Muswellbrook business owner during  
10 the 2013 downturn which resulted in him losing his sole contract with a local mine. He was on the brink of losing his 25-year established business and 30-plus local employees and that heartfelt conversation has stuck with me for almost 10 years due to the mental anguish someone in our community was experiencing because of industry uncertainty and lack of alternative opportunities which is the case still today.

For most people, including myself, it's business as usual here and I support all of our local industries including mining which is the economic backbone and largest employer in Muswellbrook. Our town and region needs certainties, confidence and ultimately time and with less than three and a half years to 2026 we deserve the  
20 opportunity to build responsible pathways as a local resident that actually lives here in Muswellbrook. Thank you for the opportunity, IPC, to share my insights, thoughts and grassroot snapshot of the reality that is life in a regional town that relies on coalmining. Thank you for this opportunity.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you, Ms Hutchison. I propose, Commissioners, we take a short break while we wait for the next speakers to be available.

#### **SHORT ADJOURNMENT**

**[3.19pm]**

30 MR ROBERTSON: Commissioners, Tony Lonergan is the next speaker. Mr Lonergan, please go ahead.

#### **<TONY LONERGAN, LOCAL RESIDENT**

MR LONERGAN: Thanks very much. Thanks, Commissioners, for the opportunity to address this hearing. I too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I have the, my presentation on the screen because there's some diagrams that I'd like to show you. My name's Tony Lonergan. My home is on Dorset Road just north-west of the mine.  
40 I grew up in this fourth-generation family farm and have lived and worked on the same property since 1981. I would like to go through some of the objections from the

EIS claims that the proponent made. The proponent justifies the project because the associated greenhouse gas emissions are only a small component of global emissions. This is clearly a false argument. Global emissions come from thousands of sources just like this one or smaller. The total emissions of 860 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent is indeed a very large amount, far in excess of Australia's annual emissions. For all of 2019, for instance, it was 550 million tonnes. The International Energy Agency says that if we're to keep warming to within a 1.5-degree limit, there can be no new coal or greenhouse projects or extensions anywhere. I've also referenced all these claims throughout. This project advocates business as usual, which has us on a trajectory beyond 3 degrees C. A study in Nature suggests that to stand a 50 per cent chance of avoiding more than 1.5 degrees C of global warming, we need to retire 89 per cent of proven coal reserves. If we want better than 50/50 odds, we need to leave more in the ground. And the benefits of this project, Mr Lauritzen said earlier today that the majority of objections against this project have come from outside of Muswellbrook. I assume he means by that submissions from, say, Lismore or Kiribati should carry less weight. The costs of this mine should not be limited to the very real costs to the community, health and quality of life in Muswellbrook, but also the costs of the planet's climate-dependent natural systems that everyone depends on for their wellbeing and basic survival. These costs cannot be ignored and must be part of the equation. As a society, we need to be reducing emissions urgently. This proposal to (not transcribable) until 2048 takes us into the complete opposite direction. Muswellbrook is eventually going to have to learn how to survive without the coal industry anyway. We don't need to contribute to making the future even more difficult on the way out.

Royalties. The EIS overstates royalties. They say it's 2 per cent. This is from, it's a Treasury document. It shows down here royalties from all mining are actually 1.7 per cent. So that's an exaggeration. I didn't see company tax paid to the Federal Government mentioned in the EIS as a benefit of the project. Presumably this mine will never make a profit on which to pay company tax. Seems to be the case for the other foreign-owned miners in the valley, including Peabody, Yancoal and Glencore, who seem to be able to arrange their affairs so as never to make a profit and therefore pay no company tax. I presume this will be similar. Based on personal income tax, if the project does not proceed, the company assumes that workers will never work again. In fact, most will find other jobs and they'll still pay income tax. This project would have little net impact on Federal Government revenue. Most of the financial benefit of this project will flow to the Indonesian owners of MACH Energy and the international suppliers of diesel machinery.

Consistent government policy. The New South Wales Climate Change Policy Framework endorses the Paris Agreement and includes as one of its aspirational

objectives the implementation of policies consistent with the Commonwealth Government's plans for long-term greenhouse gas emission reductions. Expanding a coal project of this scale is in direct contradiction of this policy.

On fugitive emissions, the International Energy Agency said that coal methane must fall by 11 per cent each year until 2030 to achieve a net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. They said part of the difficulty in estimating the scale of the problem is that mining companies do not necessarily track methane output regularly or accurately. Abandoned mines can also continue to release methane. It should be noted that the lower seams in the mine here produce significant quantities of gas in the adjoining Dartbrook underground mine, to the extent that this gas had serious impacts on the profitability of that mine. While in care and maintenance since 2006, Dartbrook has stated in its annual reports continued emissions in the order of 50,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent every year. In Australia, fugitive emissions are the fastest growing emissions sector and this mine will add to that problem. It should be a condition that MACH drain the methane from the most gaseous seams prior to mining. Up to 500,000 tonnes a year of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent is not an insignificant amount. Under no circumstances should the New South Wales taxpayer be subsidising this mine through any coal innovation program. If methane is allowed to escape into the atmosphere, other sectors of the economy will have to shoulder this emissions burden and the associated burden and the associated costs on top of their own as we strive to meet emission reduction targets that Australia is committed to. On scope 2 emissions, the Tomago aluminium smelter is the largest electricity user in New South Wales and is committed to using 100 per cent renewable energy by 2030. It should be a condition that Mount Pleasant as a major polluter does the same and sooner.

Australia's record of emissions reduction. We often hear that Australia is meeting and beating our targets. It's frustrating this statement goes largely unchallenged. The two graphs below are from the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory. The first one is Australia's total net emissions. It's this one here. Watch my cursor and you can see why 2005 was chosen for the starting date, when we had very high emissions. We didn't start at 1990, we started at 2005. You can see over that time, even from, you know, from 1998, gone down a little bit. But now if you go - this is an interactive graph, by the way. I've just taken some shots from it. 1990, 2005 here, these are all, this is the electricity sector, transport, stationary generation. This one here is land use and forestry. You can see there's been a significant decline here in this graph. That's where almost all of our emission reductions come from, apart from a very small amount in the electricity sector due to the renewable energy targets. This decision, this reduction in land use emissions is almost entirely from a 1995 decision of the Queensland Government to reverse unsustainable land clearing, so we haven't even started reducing our emissions just yet.

This is the challenge ahead for us. This is where our emissions are to date. This is projected out to 2030, so we're here at the moment. If we want to reduce our emissions to within the budget we have as a country, the 1.5 degree maximum, this is the trajectory we have to follow. We have to do zero, net zero emissions by 2030. This light blue graph is the 2 degree limit. So anywhere beyond that is complete disaster. So if we look at this, first of all, the interim report in 2018, 2018 from the IPCC, one of the things they said at this point here, 1.5 degrees, we should be able to save between 10 and 30 per cent of the world's coral reefs. At 2 degrees C we're  
10 going to lose all our tropical coral reefs, so the Barrier Reef is probably gone anyway. But that's the kind of thing we're looking at as the difference between 1.5 and 2 degrees. We don't have the luxury of projects such as this. We're completely out of time.

Also in the EIS they said about the future demand for coal ending and reducing New South Wales thermal coal exports while there is still long-term global demand would likely have little or no impact on global carbon emissions. Most coal consumers would likely to source their coal from, be likely to source their coal from elsewhere. Much of this coal would be a lower quality compared to New South Wales coal.  
20 Surely we're all weary of this argument. This is the heroin dealer's excuse. There's no evidence that this is what would occur. If Australia chose to be a leader on climate, rather than the laggard we undoubtedly have been to date, and chose to phase out thermal coal exports by not granting new approval for extensions, including this one, current customer nations such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan may well be more likely to speed up the transition to renewables if the alternative choice was to go backwards to more polluting energy. On the long-term thermal coal demand outlook, this is also from the EIS, we're here at, around about here where we've got a bit short, this is the seaborne coal trade that we're engaged in. Over that time, out to 2050, we're looking at about a 5 per cent reduction. Well, if that graph's to be relied on and we're still, the  
30 world is still burning 900 million tonnes of coal through the seaborne trade, humanity's in serious trouble. This is, after the string of climate-related disasters we've experienced in recent years and in recent weeks and days, it's surely in Australia's interest to phase out thermal coal interests that are driving climate change, exports that are driving climate change.

So I just want to look generally at some, I've been a science - okay, I'll just, just look at these two graphs if I could have one more minute, please. This is the latest temperature reconstruction for the last 20,000 years. This is the stable period where much of human civilisation has developed. This is, this is where we're heading now.  
40 What we tend to do with our emissions is going to determine (not transcribable). Remember, at this point, the difference between the current (not transcribable) and

23,000 years ago or 18,000 years ago is about two kilometres of ice over most of North America. And there's just one other example. I'd like to look at this, like you to have a look at this. This is a recent map, a precise map of the Mekong Delta and height above sea level. These are different heights here. At 80 centimetres above sea level, which is pretty much locked in, this blue area of the Mekong Delta, one of the major food bowls of Asia, (not transcribable) over 50 per cent of it's going to be underwater. So this is just an example of the problems we're facing in the future. I could show you a lot of examples of these things. So I urge you to reject this project in the interests of future generations. Thanks very much.

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MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much. Thank you for that contribution, Mr Lonergan. Can I suggest that you provide that Word document to the Commission so they have the benefit of that during the course of their deliberations?

MR LONERGAN: Okay. I've got a few suggestions about the choices there too, but you can read those. Thanks very much.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you for that. The next speaker is Ms Janet Murray. Ms Murray, you've got five minutes if you can hear us. Go ahead, Ms Murray. We can see you and hopefully we can hear you shortly.

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#### **<JANET MURRAY, GREENS CANDIDATE FOR HUNTER**

MS MURRAY: Thank you. Now, I ran as the Greens candidate in the federal seat of Hunter in the last federal election on a platform of keeping coal and gas in the ground. So on behalf of the people who voted for me, I'm asking you to refuse consent to the extension of the Mount Pleasant mine on the grounds that it's not in the public interest due to its impact on greenhouse emissions and climate change. Now, in the assessment, it indicates that the majority, 98 per cent, of greenhouse emissions generated by the project comprise scope 3 emissions that would arise from the downstream consumption of coal by end users, and that under the Paris Agreement scope 3 emissions are not included in the project emission reporting to avoid double-counting.

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Now, as far as I'm concerned that appears to be an accounting convention. It is not a licence for us to keep exporting a product that we know is causing harm to everyone on the planet including ourselves. We all know that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and methane go into the one atmosphere. It doesn't matter where the coal is burnt, emissions mix and affect the whole planet. So that includes back here in Australia, in New South Wales, in the Hunter Valley increasing extreme heat days, increasing the ferocity of bushfires,

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increasing the frequency and destructiveness of flooding and increasing loss of life from these extreme weather events.

If we seriously want to limit temperature increases to a safe level we need to attack the big sources of carbon emissions first, not the small ones. So we need to worry about the 860 million tonnes from burning the coal, not the 16 million tonnes from digging it up. If this extension is approved it only opens the door for more extension applications. Now, I see in section 3 the department acknowledges that the global transition away from fossil fuels to low carbon energy sources is required and that this transition has begun. Now, in MACH Energy's greenhouse gas assessment potential customer countries are listed. Since then Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan have all updated their nationally-determined contributions and now they all have net zero by 2050 targets with only Thailand being without a net zero target.

So with these targets thermal coal demand can only go in one direction and that is down. So gradual closing of coalmines will reinforce the message to these customer countries that they need to get on with their alternative energy plans. For developing countries in our region such as Thailand, Australia should be helping them to leapfrog the coal age altogether rather than getting them hooked on it for the next 30 years. If we look at graph 4 on page 121 in the submissions report, and I'm sorry, I don't have it to hand, it shows a steady decrease in coal production from the Hunter Valley from a peak in 2024 but the last five fading out in the 2040s.

I find it hard to see why Mount Pleasant should be the last mine operating when two out of three products in its range don't meet the Newcastle Thermal Coal Benchmarks specification. I'd like you to really consider whether our unbridled pursuit of fossil fuels has been in the public interest of Australia. Has it improve our relations with our Pacific neighbours who face the actual threat of their islands going under? Clearly not. In fact, we now have a Chinese presence on our doorstep in the Solomon Islands. You know, has it sent the right message to our export customers giving them the impetus to get serious about renewables in the required timeframe? It has not. Has it ensured that governments and communities work together to diversify regional economies to ensure ongoing employment as coal declines? Regrettably it has not.

So my question is, are you going to approve yet another mining operation knowing full well that it is contributing to global warming and more extreme temperatures and weather events right here, right now in the Hunter Valley affecting coal workers as much as everyone else. I'm requesting that you refuse consent for the 22-year extension of the Mount Pleasant mine because it is not in the public interest of any of us.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much for that contribution. The next speaker is Tayah Clout. Ms Clout, can you hear us?

MS CLOUT: Yes, I can.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you. Please go ahead. Five minutes has been set aside for your submissions.

**<TAYAH CLOUT, UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL**

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MS CLOUT: Okay. Thank you. Climate change is evidently here right now. Look at the significant flooding we're seeing across Singleton, Bulga and Broke as well as right across Sydney and other areas. This means the time to act for the future of the earth right now. This extremely polluting, short-sighted plan to expand Mount Pleasant should not be approved. All of us have a stake in making sure there is a habitable planet in the future and while MACH Energy, an Indonesian company, not even an Australian one, may feel that the short-term financial gain to it justifies the massive level of omissions released in the life of the project by, along with many others, do not think there are enough benefits to justify approving this extension.

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876 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent being released in the next 22 years is an absolutely huge amount. I understand this project is the most carbon-polluting project the IPC has assessed and that the New South Wales Department of Planning has itself stated that there is a global transition away from fossil fuels. The Upper Hunter Shire Council opposes this project and while it may not be in our shire it is only five kilometres from Aberdeen, a town that will almost definitely feel the impacts from this mine.

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Air quality around Muswellbrook has already been found to be the poorest in the state, it clearly will not take long for Aberdeen to have even poorer air quality than it currently does after an expansion of this size. Air quality is already negatively affected across the shire. On a day with a southerly wind blowing poor air quality is very noticeable. The Department of Planning and Environment and environment air quality monitoring network shows air quality is declining across the Upper Hunter currently. The noise impacts from this mine expansion will also be significant on residents above Aberdeen and surrounding farm land alongside the visual and water quality impacts.

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While the Upper Hunter Shire Council has entered into a voluntary planning agreement with MACH Energy contingent on approval of this project the decision to enter such an agreement was far from unanimous. Upper Hunter Shire Council

recognise that we are in a state of climate emergency and that we must act accordingly. There are threatened flora and fauna in the proposed expansion zone and nearby including the striped legless lizard, the swift parrot, Regent honeyeater, spotted-tailed quoll and the already endangered koala. The approximately 475 hectares of native vegetation that will be destroyed in this expansion includes habitats already under increasing threat from land clearing such as the box gum, grey box and ironbark woodlands. 876 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent being released into the atmosphere from this project should be reason enough to deny approval.

- 10 There is no reason to think that coal from this mine would remain in Australia and so approval cannot be justified by the current energy crisis in this country. This expansion is a terrible idea and has no doubt been said many times today but at some point giant polluting projects like this one have to be stopped. The effects from approval will be far too negative and will be too late to mitigate such effects in even a few years, let alone after 22 years. This shire, just like all others across this country, is currently experiencing a housing crisis. The major flood events of recent months alongside the bushfires before that have made this crisis in housing much worse and given such rain and fire events have been aggravated by increasing temperatures due to climate change.

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Big polluting companies must be prevented from causing further climate catastrophe. The only way to stop climate change getting worse is to stop approving projects such as this one. Short-term gain to the local economy through employment of locals is not sustainable given the issue of high income workers buying high-priced houses and then losing their job when the mine closes. This is already becoming an issue in the Hunter Valley, and given the global trend away from coal and fossil fuels this problem will only increase, especially with the approval of a project like this. Australia as the driest continent on earth, perhaps not at the moment, cannot afford to approve projects such as this. We are in an age that faces the extremes of weather on a day-to-day basis and that's without factoring climate change in. I implore the IPC to consider all elements of this mine when considering the approval and to not approve such a disastrous project. Thanks for having taken the time to listen.

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MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much, Ms Clout. The next speaker is Susan Ainge. Ms Ainge, five minutes has been set aside for you.

MS AINGE: Thank you very much.

MR ROBERTSON: Please go ahead, we can hear you loud and clear.

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**<SUSAN AINGE, SCONE RESIDENT**

MS AINGE: Excellent. My name is Susan Ainge. I'd like to pay respects to the Wonnarua People, their leaders past, present and future. As a resident of Scone I would like to object to the proposed extension of Mount Pleasant mine on four grounds. Firstly, small particulate pollution, PM2.5. Second, greenhouse gas. Third, social grounds and fourth, rehabilitation. In detail, PM2.5 or small particulate pollution is the most injurious to health as its effects are cumulative. In MACH's submission report, poor monitoring at the present Mount Pleasant operation results in gaps at Muswellbrook north-west and Aberdeen and even with those gaps

10 Muswellbrook still has the poorest air quality in the state. This particular pollution will only increase with further diesel road and mine transport and accurate monitoring can only substantiate the forecast poor health projections which accompany mine expansion.

Greenhouse gas. MACH Energy have stated in their submission that the expansion area between the depth of 225 metres and the planned base of 275 metres has a higher gas zone with estimated methane levels of three to four cubic metres per tonne of coal but the technical difficulties and costs would preclude an operation of pre-drainage to remove and contain this methane. In fact, the alternative is to release it into the

20 atmosphere. The voracity of MACH's estimate of three to four cubic metres of methane per tonne is questionable when adjacent underground mines, I believe, have measured concentrations at similar levels of 10 cubic metres of methane per tonne of coal. This, I think, we should ask them to verify.

Third, social context. Extra employment for the region is given as a benefit but it is also a cost, a cost to the community. The Hunter Valley, in particular the Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter Shires, have a critical accommodation shortage at present. Higher wage-earning mine workers will compete with local families displacing them in accommodation but not replacing their contribution to local

30 schools, charities, the SES and the hospital auxiliary to name a few. In addition to this, long distance commuters and commuting workers have no allegiance at all to their local work locale, just utilising that infrastructure and the facilities where needed but making no contribution to them. MACH's token voluntary plan agreement which give 20 million to Muswellbrook Shire and six to the Upper Hunter are merely petty cash in comparison to the estimated three billion per year revenue that they'll be getting from coal.

As a former Hunter Valley resident, now returned after nearly 60 years, I've seen the Valley transform over that period from a verdant green and healthy ecosystem to one

40 burnt by sulphide and vulnerable to drought with water tables reduced and vegetation diminished. Not that I was alien from mining as my father was a chief mining

engineering at the joint Coal Board and early excursions with dad were to the underground mines of the Valley. After 26 years-plus as a regenerative farmer I have some understanding of soil biosystems and rehabilitation. The “rehabilitation” that MACH indulges in is no more than window-dressing which cannot equate to the lost ecosystems that we will see by the expansion of this mine. I’d like to thank you for hearing me today.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you very much for that contribution, Ms Ainge.  
Commissioners, the last speaker for today is Cameron Parry. Mr Parry, five minutes  
10 set aside for you.

MR PARRY: Good afternoon. Can you hear me okay?

MR ROBERTSON: Yes, we can, loud and clear.

**<CAMERON PARRY, BLACKROCK INDUSTRIES**

MR PARRY: Thank you. Please I just wish to honour the traditional owners past and present. Thank you for allowing me this chance to say a few words. It is sort of clear  
20 straightaway just by the detail in the brief what I was given when to speak today by talking to the Independent Planning Commission around whether to put conditions or close or refuse this application, well, blind Freddy would say that it only needs to be seriously approved and/or conditions put on it. Closing or refusing is an absolute disaster.

If there is anything that was learnt from the last three years, (not transcribable) with an agenda and with one size fits all does not work. What does work is individualism, community grassroots. If there is any certainty and clarity in this project it will continue and maintain community and individuals for years and decades to come. My  
30 name is Cameron Parry. I live at Dry Creek and I work for Blackrock Industries. Blackrock is an organisation with passion and has community at its core. I’m not a traditional custodian, not an academic, I’m somewhat a skilled tradesman in my field and I’ve been involved with business myself. I understand the need for jobs and cash flow.

A project like this gives an opportunity for Blackrock Industries and the community and we all will be directly impacted. Absolutely everyone - anything that affects this community affects everyone within it so shutting down a project will affect  
40 community, it will affect everyone. There is no one it does not affect. My employment is solid because of projects like this and the flow-on effect are lasting and priceless. It allows the community to do things that give them purpose, things we

want to do at home, things we want to do outside of work, it supports others in our community and people, community organisations from sporting to community-minded organisations that give back. Projects like this allow balance and a chance to take the time because you have a purpose.

10 I'm a supervisor for Blackrock Industry and my role and title is a supervisor mentor. I supervise and mentor inmates, in particular, that are on work release including original inmates and non-original inmates. It's clear working with these men they understand purpose and they understand passion because they live in the moment of now, not  
10 living in the past but today because worrying about the future or the past is not helpful because they need to live from day to day just to survive. So the opportunity that they get coming out and doing work and knowing that it's a win-win, a chance to earn cash flow, a chance to do something with passion and purpose. Having that passion and purpose only drives people around them, people are inspired by their own struggles and fight, makes you want to live with passion and purpose.

20 I talk about passion and purpose because it is what we all desire, we desire to do something with passion, we desire to do something with purpose. When we do that we don't worry about the future, we don't worry about the past, you're transcending  
20 future and past by living with passion and purpose. These men that we have are tradespeople, we have skilled labourers, people that can be part of a skill shortage solution. Industries like the mining companies, like MACH that give us opportunities. Companies like Blackrock Industries that work in this industry that allow people like inmates with passion and purpose, skilled and tradespeople to enter back into the workforce and bring them forward into community engagement. They then become individuals, they're then grow, they live their desires and dreams and they engage themselves back into community. They shop locally, they talk locally, they get involved in community events. I talk about all this because with this sort of project all  
30 this happens.

In closing, apart from the obvious fact that the country is broken and broke we need jobs. We have an opportunity to grow and develop community and live with passion and purpose. Thank you.

MR ROBERTSON: Thank you, Mr Parry. Commissioners, that ends the program of speakers for today. Professor Clark.

40 PROF. CLARK: Thank you. Thank you, Mr Robertson. That brings us to the end of day 1 of this public hearing and I want to thank everyone who spoke to day for your thoughtful presentations and the efforts that you put in there. A transcript of today's proceedings will be made available on our website in the next few days. Written

submissions on the matter will be accepted by the Commission up to 5.00pm Australian Eastern Standard Time on Friday, the 15th of July, 2022. You can make a submission using the Have Your Say portal on our website, by email or post. It's particularly helpful to us if you could focus your submissions on the department's assessment report and the draft recommended conditions. We'll adjourn until 9.00am tomorrow, Friday, the 8th of July, 2022 for day 2 proceedings. Again thank you.

**ADJOURNED UNTIL FRIDAY 8 JULY, 2022**

**[4.01pm]**