

MOD 1 - Waste Tyres, Road Haulage and Concrete Batch Plant

Vickery Extension Project

Submission – 19th September 2024

“In weighing up the main environmental impacts (costs and benefits) associated with the proposal as assessed and described in this Modification Report, the Modification is on balance, considered to be in the public interest of the State of NSW.

This statement is made by a company that does not consider the environmental effects that it leaves behind and only considers its shareholder profits and minimum economic rehabilitation.

The World Climatic position as it is, cannot afford to be using more fossil fuels and increasing global warming that is already reaching tipping point where countries around the world are already heavily impacted by major unforeseen flooding events, fires and famine.

Modification 1. *‘Modification to allow for the disposal of heavy vehicle waste tyres in the waste rock emplacement areas, extended run-of-mine (ROM) coal road haulage hours and the establishment and use of a concrete batching plant.*

Although this Modification is promoted with just these three changes to be approved, it is vastly different when there are seven more major changes to this approved SSD project in the first of many Modifications! To allow such major changes in the form of a ‘Modification’ to a project in such a short amount of time since its approval is nothing short of deception both by the proponent and the planning department and all other government departments that these changes have been orchestrated behind closed doors with. All these major changes should have formed part of the IPC approval.

1. additional Project rail loop construction footprint;

This rail loop should not have been approved across a flood plain.

2. construction of pipelines from transfer points on the adjoining Mirrabinda and Ovenden properties and from the Mine Infrastructure Area to the Rocglen Coal Mine;

Impacts were felt by both the local community and the environment when the Maules Creek Coal Mine illegally harvested floodplain water in a drought. The community do not want a repeat of this on the Southern side of the Leard State Forest at the Vickery Coal Mine.

It was clearly reported to the IPC by many concerned citizens that this Vickery Coal Mine did not have enough water to operate during the drier times. WHC’s continuous retort was that *“we hold sufficient licences for all our operations”*.

Water – With on-farm storage, interconnected pipelines, Bore water, Floodplain harvesting, River water and In-flow to the pit. Good luck with all those meters, guess work and the self - reporting by Vickery coal mine to Compliance Staff.

After the Maules Creek Coal Mine was prosecuted for illegally harvesting water in a drought, how can the community be confident that there will be an accurate way to account for the water that is transferred from one mine to another and back again?

Then there is the question of just how will there be accurate accountability from on-farm storage water that could contain water from 1. The River; 2. Bore water; 3. Floodplain harvesting then transferred to the mine site?

Vickery Coal Mine really has the upper hand here, as *'Water to be transferred from the adjacent private properties would be extracted from the ground by the landholders in accordance with existing groundwater bores with Works Approvals, bore extraction limits and Water Access Licences issued under the Water Management Act 2000.*

Now that's a smart way to get water without Vickery having its own licences, just pay landholders to use their licences. How is that going to be verified and monitored? Or did I misunderstand. (Table ES-1 - Key Outcomes of Environmental Review for the Modified Project)

Water is a big issue and it will be a bigger headache for the Compliance Team to make sure that all water is accounted for when water is transferred from and to 4 different mines sites. The Maules Creek Mine has already illegally transferred water via a 'pipeline' from properties to their mine site in the Leard State Forest, and then had every part of the construction and a licence retrospectively granted! Farmers wouldn't be granted such leniency.

Recommendation: The pipeline should not be approved. If as Vickery stated at the IPC: *"we hold sufficient licences for all our operations"*. And all their operations should provide their own water for their operations on each site and not continually overburden near neighbours at other sites, with drawdown to their bores that are used for stock, domestic and agriculture, by transferring water from one mine site to another.

3. upgrade of an existing access road to provide temporary construction access to the Project rail spur;

Building of a rail line across the floodplains has been and still is a huge environment issue that in times of flood will cause water to be diverted from its natural path and cause unknown issues for the neighbours in close proximity and downstream. Climate change is very unpredictable and we should not be allowing construction of obstacles such as rail lines that will be obsolete in the future to be constructed on floodplains.

Recommendation: The rail spur should not be constructed across a flood plain.

4. an alternative realignment of the approved Blue Vale Road diversion and commensurate reduction of the open cut extent;

5. construction and use of a temporary concrete batching plant;

A concrete batching plant may save Vickery Coal money by not having to out-source concrete, but water will be required to produce such a product and will only add to the total water required on top of their mining, dust suppression and rehabilitation watering needs of this

mine, hence taken from the environment and depleting underground aquifers and the alluvium.

<https://www.cementaustralia.com.au/sites/default/files/2022-05/CASDS23%20Concrete%20Mix.pdf>

6.2 Environmental precautions

Do not allow to enter into soil/subsoil. Do not allow to enter into surface water or drains.

Limit leakages with earth or sand.

While another of the Whitehaven projects have already been fined for polluting the environment due to a spill, it is extremely concerning that this Vickery Coal Mine wants to build and produce their own concrete. This is extremely close to a tributary of Stratford Creek and the Namoi River; a spill would be disastrous as described in 6.2 Environmental precautions above. The other consideration is the extreme dust with health affecting components such as silica - Crystalline Quartz (respirable dust)

Recommendation: The temporary cement batching plant should not be approved.

6. extraction, crushing and screening of up to 90,000 cubic metres (m3) of gravel in any calendar year from the site for collection by customers (daytime hours only);

Crushing and screening of up to 90,000 cubic meters of 'gravel' is of concern due to the constituents of this 'gravel'. Are we not talking about waste rock etc from this open-cut coal mine? If so, it could be presumed that a large part of this 'gravel' would contain at least some forms of toxic heavy metals and a proportion of coal. Then there is the real concern regarding the 'dust' that this crushing and screening will produce and become airborne, again most likely containing micro particles 2.5PM of highly toxic heavy metals that could easily be spread to near neighbours and the township of Boggabri, just a short 15kms to the Northwest. This extra cumulative dust from the crusher combined with weekly blasting events that also carries micro particles of toxic heavy metals is not acceptable.

Recommendation: The crushing and screening of 90,000 cubic meters per year is an unacceptable health risk to the near neighbours and the Township of Boggabri. This must not be approved due to major health risks.

7. disposal of waste heavy vehicle tyres in the waste rock emplacement areas;

Waste Off Road Tyre disposal – Environmental impacts – unknown impact for generations to come as the rubber leaches its toxic components, Cost \$\$\$ to the Environment, cost to Vickery Coal mine \$0

Waste management – The Approved project stated: **No disposal of heavy vehicle waste tyres on site.**

Now like all the open cut coal mines in the Leard State Forest, Vickery Coal Mine expects to be exempt from recycling their Off Road Tyres, by including in their mod 1 ***Stockpiling, ongoing management and disposal of heavy vehicle waste tyres within waste rock emplacement areas.***

The local communities are disgusted that the EPA and Planning are allowing thousands of tons of Off Road Tyres per year, to be buried instead of insuring that these mining companies are encouraged to recycle these resources. Giving them 2 years at a time to say that its uneconomical and there are no recycling plants for Off Road Tyres, it's simply not true there are no recycling facilities.

If Vickery Coal mine are permitted to bury tyres, then there must be a comparative 'Waste facility' fee charged per tyre for the disposal of used Off Road Tyres buried under 'Waste rock emplacement'. All the Liverpool Plains coal mining companies should be charged a fee to incentivise them to recycle their Off Road Tyres. These State Forests and Agricultural lands are not 'Waste Facilities' and should not be used by these companies as such.

The EPA Hierarchy has burial of waste tyres at the bottom of the list not the top! If there is no fee charged then there is no incentive for these companies to have the tyres recycled and become part of a circular economy. No community member is allowed to bury tyres, so why should mining companies be allowed?

Vickery will continue to bury their waste tyres to save company money, while polluting the environment. If Vickery can afford to bring in new Off Road Tyres by truck, then they can use the empty trucks to transport the used Off Road Tyres to a recycling facility.

The community suggests that the mining companies on the Liverpool Plains should finance a local recycling facility to process all the hundreds of thousands of tons of Off Road Tyres over the life of this and other local mines, instead of burying them where they can leach toxins into the surrounding ground and ground water sources.

Recommendation: Tyre burial at Vickery Coal Mine should be denied - and this company should have their tyres transported to a recycling facility.

8. extended ROM coal road haulage hours;

The extended ROM coal road haulage hours – and the traffic that will be transversing the Kamilaroi Highway west of Gunnedah, to access the Gunnedah CHPP combined with the already heavy traffic burden on this small and dangerous section of road from the Tarrawonga coal mine road haulage is dangerous. In the initial Tarrawonga approval, there was an 'Overpass' to be constructed by this Whitehaven company, to facilitate a safe crossing over the Kamilaroi Highway near the Gunnedah CHPP entrance.

Why has the department of Planning allowed this company to disregard this approval condition by just dismissing it every time the community bring it up and the public ask questions? Why has this Kamilaroi Highway Overpass never been constructed? If Vickery Coal Mine intends to put more heavily laden 'uncovered' coal trucks on the road then the original Overpass must be built!

Recommendation: No more uncovered heavily laden coal trucks to cross the Kamilaroi Highway until the is Overpass bridge is constructed.

9. improve mine landform designs using best practice geomorphic design principles;

The final landform topography and major increase in height which is much higher than the original landscape, will alter the whole previous landscape rainfall runoff and capture to surrounding neighbouring properties, the Vickery State Forest and the small tributaries to the Namoi River.

<https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=SSD-7480%2120190313T215528.691%20GMT>

'Mr Middlemiss recommends that additional groundwater modelling is undertaken to help inform consideration of final void alternatives, such as backfilling to the pre-mining groundwater level.

<https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=SSD-7480%2120190313T215528.156%20GMT>

'The Condition 50 position assumes minimum groundwater quality risks to the surrounding groundwater regime if the final void forms a terminal sink. However, terminal pit void lake sinks do pose water quality risks, typically via salinity increases due to evapo-concentration (Johnson and Wright, 2003; Younger and Wolkersdorfer, 2004), as shown in this case.

'Similarly, while significant reductions in risks to groundwater quality could be achieved by backfilling the pit void to the pre-mining groundwater level to minimise final void lake evaporation and salinisation impacts, leachate potential must again also be considered. These issues, and related uncertainties, do not appear to have been adequately explored in the EIS to identify minimum impact closure options.

- Why is Vickery Coal mine contemplating mining to a depth of 250 meters below the surface level when the last coal seam is at a depth of 160 meters below the surface level?

10. update of the Schedule of Lands and a minor change to a rehabilitation objective.



Rocglen 2022 –Rehabilitation?



Tarrawonga 2022 – Rehabilitation & erosion?



Maules Creek Coal – 2022 Where is that Rehabilitation? Where are the trees & understory?

Well, if the extension is approved then I guess there is no problem as they are going to be digging up some of this wonderful Rehabilitation!

As you can see from the 3 photographs, the Whitehaven companies are not all that interested in rehabilitating their mine sites. Words in Management Plans mean very little. And it probably won't be any different at the Vickery Mine site in years to come. A very disappointing outcome for the community and the environment when trees are bulldozed and miserable rehabilitation replaces habitat many years after they should be.

This project Modification 1. is definitely not in the interest of the public of NSW and certainly not in the interest of local farming communities that feed and clothe and contribute to the local and wider economy. This Modification will destroy more Agricultural businesses, tear communities apart and destroy environmental habitat. The impacts of the light, noise and dust will be felt by near neighbours and the wider community when underground water sources are depleted.

This Vickery extension Modification 1 should not be approved, it is not in the public interest.