

Kate Mitchell

55 Horns Crossing Road

Vacy NSW 2421

17 July 2021

Director – Resource Assessments

Planning & Assessment

Department of Planning, Industry & Environment

Locked Bag 5022

Parramatta NSW 2124

Martins Creek Quarry Expansion – Application No SSD-6612

Dear Sir/Madam

I am vehemently **opposed** to the Daracon Martins Creek Quarry Expansion proposal that is currently on exhibition. There are many reasons why the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment should not go ahead. If granted, these massively expanded operations will have catastrophic effects for families living in the vicinity of the quarry, along the haul route, on the wider local communities and on the peaceful, natural environment in which we live.

It is clear that the current quarry could not be located in a worse position for a 'state significant project'. Indeed, the community should have had a say in whether the quarry should be declared 'state significant.' The Martins Creek quarry is nestled deeply in the small rural township of Martins Creek and is bordered by the lovely historic town of Paterson and surrounding Duns Creek, Webbers Creek, Butterwick Road, Tocal Homestead and college. The existing quarry is 23 kilometres from an arterial road which means that using large numbers of trucks to haul quarry material long distances, will cause catastrophic destruction to social amenity, roads (major road safety issues), tourism, local businesses, health, and the environment. It does not make sense for this to happen when there is already a large quarry at Brandy Hill which can provide the same material to local and regional areas. The approval granted to the expansion of Brandy Hill Quarry is a big loss for the environment (especially the Koalas with the resulting loss of native habitat). But, at least this quarry is very close to an arterial road so that the local communities are not subjected to huge numbers of trucks driving right through their townships. But, why on earth would we need another 'mega' quarry within a relatively close area?

Lived Experiences with the unlawful operation of Martins Creek Quarry by Daracon:

Martins Creek Quarry operated fairly harmoniously with the community before Daracon took over the lease and successively increased their operations well beyond lawful consents over a number of years. Their unlawful operations of Daracon at Martins Creek Quarry, particularly between 2012-16

resulted in irrevocable destruction to the environment as well as physical and mental health issues to the families that reside close to the quarry and on the haul route where we were subjected to an unbelievable number of truck movements per day on our local roads. The lived experience of the quarry operations during this time was terrible.

We moved to Horns Crossing Road with our very young children in 2009 and we checked in with Dungog Shire Council about the size of the quarry and its operation before purchasing our property. We were satisfied at this time that it was a small quarry, with reasonable hours of operation and was not too intrusive in regards to noise, dust, truck movements and rail loading. At this time we could not see the quarry from our property as it was obscured by trees. We were excited to be living on a picturesque rural property with our children having the chance to ride bikes and horses in our paddocks and look after farm animals (sheep and chickens). As operations at the Martin's Creek quarry started to escalate, our lifestyle and no doubt the lives of others living around the quarry, was severely negatively affected. The frequent and very loud blasting, terrified our dogs and hens, and frightened my youngest pre-school aged child when Daracon used explosives, seemingly randomly during the day. We weren't given any notification prior to these frequent blasts. We lived in an old farmhouse at this time and our home developed multiple cracks in walls and ceilings, which were not there prior to the escalation of these blasts. We have since built our 'dream home' after 10 years of saving to reduce our mortgage (difficult to do with 4 children) and our real concern is that our new home will become subject to the same damage from Daracon's blasting. As well as this, driving to and from work and taking my children to school and preschool, was often a stressful experience due to the sheer volume of large quarry trucks on the roads. The congestion at school drop off times, in particular, was horrendous and often traffic (always involving several B double quarry trucks in the line of traffic) heading into Paterson was banked up on Dungog road well before the level rail crossing when long coal and freight trains were travelling through Paterson. Travelling behind quarry trucks or passing them on the road when travelling in the opposite direction was always hazardous and we have had considerable windscreen damage and multiple windscreens having to be replaced, due to gravel or rocks being flung onto our car windscreens by the trucks. After one incident near Martins Creek (around 2012), where a rock hit my windscreen, startling me and causing a massive crack, I phoned the Quarry to complain. I was given the phone number of a Daracon manager. He asked the time that this occurred and then stated that it couldn't have been one of his trucks as the Daracon trucks at this time were transporting large rocks and if a rock of this size had hit my windscreen, I would be dead!

Other negative impacts of the quarry trucks which we directly experienced was when attempting to shop and spend time with others in our local community. The noise of the huge B double trucks (particularly empty) as they bounced through town on the way to the quarry, was unbelievable. When in the butchers or IGA, during this time, all conversation would have to be suspended as nothing else could be heard above the roaring and crashing of the trucks. Sitting outside the café for a milkshake or burger became very unpleasant, due both to the noise of the trucks, the dust generated and the noxious diesel fumes they emitted. A completely independent study of the possible health effects of these fumes, should be completed by NSW Health. A reliance on reports supplied by companies paid by Daracon, should not be the only measure on health effects. It is difficult to quantify the significant impacts of the previous unlawful truck movements through Paterson on the tight-knit social fabric of our rural community, but peoples' lived experiences should be considered. It was a nightmare then and will become so again, should Daracon's proposal to haul quarry material at hugely expanded levels again (from legal levels of 90 back to 280 truck movements per day Monday to Friday). The massive disruption of our normally peaceful rural environment cannot be quantified by an external agency (Umwelt) assigning some kind of arbitrary

sliding scale for social impacts where Daracon's minimal 'mitigations' in extractions amounts and truck movements are believed to somehow lessen the damage to rural amenity.

It is not just the noise and air pollution but the danger of having that many big trucks on our rural roads and travelling through the busy and thriving heritage town of Paterson and beyond, that should be considered. Crossing the road, collecting children from buses, moving between shops, was all fraught with danger when the truck movements escalated, particularly after 2012. The size, volume and obstruction to visibility caused by these vehicles travelling through our small town, cannot be understated. The dog-leg in the centre of town almost always results in large vehicles crossing the midline and this issue is not sufficiently addressed by the proposed traffic amendments outlined by SECA, in a report paid for by the proponent, Daracon. We have witnessed many 'near misses' between trucks and cars as the large vehicles have crossed double lines when attempting to traverse this part of our town.

The visible impact of the current and proposed extension to the Martins Creek quarry should be considered in more detail. Now unfortunately, thanks to years of unlawful operation, the quarry is a massive and ugly scar on the landscape, which is very visible from our property and for many residences surrounding the quarry. Vast amounts of trees and vegetation have been removed already (during the unlawful operation of the quarry over a number of years) and one can only imagine the number of native animals that have been killed or have perished when their homes have been destroyed. A previous visibility assessment undertaken by Umwelt claims that residences on Horns Crossing road will not be affected by the view of the quarry. This is not our lived experience. Also, with the continued destruction of trees in the quarry pits, the quarrying noises (truck movements, blasting, heavy machine noises) echo across the valley and can be clearly heard from our property.

We have friends and extended family who live in urban areas of NSW and overseas, who have loved visiting us over the years, to enjoy a period of rural amenity in our lovely Paterson Valley. The ability to show them around our townships, visiting local cafes, pubs, shops, parks and rivers was disrupted by the ramping up of Martins Creek quarry productions which were allowed to continue until halted by the Supreme Court Judgement in 2019. Our visitors were shocked by the noise of the blasting and quarrying operations from our property and the large numbers of trucks moving through town. We often have family members stay for extended periods so the new proposal by Daracon to have trucks running Monday to Friday will still have a negative impact on tourism to the area as a whole and more personally to our family members and friends who enjoy escaping to our beautiful rural property for the peace, serenity and bird sounds that can be enjoyed (without a mega quarry in our 'backyard').

The Biodiversity Assessment report undertaken by Conacher Consulting (employed by Daracon) does recognise that the removal and clearing of native habitat will have as an impact consequence, "major alteration to ecosystem components and function" and that the impact duration is "permanent". However, it seems that the very real danger to threatened species and habitat, can be easily offset by species and ecosystem credits! During the twelve years we have lived in Vacy we have had sightings (both on our property and neighbouring properties) of koalas, echidnas, a wombat, and numerous owl sightings. Although Conacher frequently reported that native animal sightings were 'not observed' during their surveys, we know that the local habitat is host to many of these different species, including rare and threatened species.

Daracon employed Umwelt to liaise with the local communities and allow a better level of consultation with impacted community members. This has not been a success, despite the many

tables and data they have supplied in their social impact assessment. Although several thousand community members (including families living all along the haul route) have been and will be permanently negatively impacted by this quarry expansion if it goes ahead, only a relatively small number of people were contacted, interviewed or involved in community liaison meetings. Although I signed up via email to be kept informed by Umwelt, I was not invited to any consultation meetings and indeed only found out about the Social Impact Forum earlier this year, when I was emailed by a member of the Martins Creek Quarry Action Group. This was a very disappointing process where Umwelt (Daracon) attempted to bamboozle the community with confusing data and social impact 'projections' where they assigned what appeared to be arbitrary social impact rating reductions on social impacts scaled down from 'extreme' with initial project figures to 'moderate' or even 'low' once the proposed 'mitigations' were in place. Community members attempted to ask how these ratings could be assigned and argued that the social impacts would still be 'catastrophic' or 'severe' with the new quarry proposal. This was dismissed by Umwelt/Daracon and community members left this forum feeling that there was absolutely no 'collaboration' and we were just being told what was going to happen. I would like to state here that the supposed community consultation process, has been a massive fail and indeed, appears to be just a tick-a-box process, rather than a proper process to understand "...impacts from the perspectives of those involved in a personal, community, social or cultural sense, to provide a complete picture of potential impacts, their context and meaning."

Objections to the revised Martins Creek Quarry SSD:

I have outlined below my comments on each of the amended features of the SSD application related to the mega expansion planned for Martins Creek Quarry. This development should not go ahead and I object to key features of the proposal as set out below:

1. Quarry Operation Approval Term: A revision from 30 to 25 years is an extremely slight mitigation. A quarter of a century is still an incredibly long time for local communities to suffer the extreme disruption to health and well being caused by having a mega quarry operate nearby. This means that generations of families will be subjected to the constant disruption to our previously (prior to Daracon's control of the quarry) peaceful rural lifestyles. If this operation approval term with planned levels of extraction are granted, the social impact on health, wellbeing and community will be disastrous.
2. Quarry extent: Proposed additional disturbance 17 hectares. An additional 42 acres of quarry pits is an absolutely enormous amount and is it hard to imagine how it will be able to be rehabilitated. It may even be more than this as Daracon's glossy brochure states that "The revised project will require the additional disturbance of approximately 21 ha (51.9 acres) of native vegetation from within the 127 ha (313.8 acres) of the Project Area." The environmental impact that this will cause is vast. Many native animals as well as native trees and vegetation in this area will not recover. 36.8 hectares of vegetation will be cleared and the DoEE previously determined that this destruction will have a negative impact on:
 - Slaty Red Gum – vulnerable.
 - Koala population – vulnerable.
 - Regent Honeyeater – Critically Endangered.
 - Swift Parot – Critically Endangered.
 - Spot-tailed Quoll- Endangered.

Despite this, there appear to be no real checks on Daracon's proposal to destroy another 40-50 acres of native habitat housing many different species of fauna. This seems ludicrous and totally at odds with the current climate of a more socially and environmentally aware public.

3. Extraction Limit: The figure of 1.1 **million** tonnes per year is unchanged from the 2018 revised project and is an unacceptable amount as it will require very significant amounts of blasting (massive noise and dust issues) and then enormous quantities of quarry product to move. Although Umwelt/Daracon assure us that the blasting has been subjected to rigorous noise monitoring and found to have 'minimal impact' for most residents, this is not the lived experience of many families residing close to the quarry. The massive amount of rock proposed to be removed annually will necessitate huge and/or frequent blasting. Although Daracon claim to successively rehabilitate the land, it is hard to believe that this could be possible, with the size and scale of previous unlawful and future planned extraction levels. Are there any guarantees that it won't be abandoned or perhaps become a huge dump for Sydney's excess rubbish?

4. Road Transport Limit: A yearly limit by road of half a million tonnes is enormous and not compatible with our tranquil rural environment. The hourly truck movements of 20 laden trucks (40 movements) and 280 movements through our townships would completely ruin the social amenity that currently exists. During the unlawful operations of 2012-2018, our towns suffered with people's lives being severely disrupted by having to deal with the noise, dust, diesel fumes, traffic danger caused by having these trucks constantly moving through our narrow streets. Near crashes were commonly witnessed and on at least two occasions parked cars were sideswiped by quarry trucks. It is our lived experience that these large numbers of trucks moving through Historic Paterson, are not only dangerous for pedestrians, but ruinous to the social fabric and sense of community that exists. No one will want to spend any time shopping and socialising in our busy village centre when the large truck numbers return to with the resultant noise pollution and air pollution from the diesel fumes and dust from the trucks and quarry product. The health effects from diesel fumes and silica dust are becoming more apparent and should certainly be another reason to refuse this expansion proposal. The 280 truck movements from Daracon along the haul route will make already busy roads into Maitland, far worse. The cumulative effect of Daracon trucks from Martins Creek Quarry and Brandy Hill Quarry (joining at Bolwarra Service Station junction) will make car journeys a nightmare for many hundreds of residents heading into Maitland and East Maitland. The TIA concludes that the traffic lights junction at the Melbourne Street and Pitnacree Road intersections are currently operating "close to capacity" and already result in "considerable delays and congestion". How then can proposed increased heavy vehicle movements (from Martins Creek and Brandy Hill Quarries) not lead to significant levels of congestion, especially during peak am and pm times? The road count information also is presented as combined vehicle movements. This is misleading as normal light traffic cannot be compared to massive articulated heavy vehicles where each one is the size of several normal cars. The damage to the road infrastructure is going to come from these heavily laden trucks, not family vehicles.

5. Rail Transport Limit and train loading/rail transport: Up to 600,000 tonnes per year to be transported by rail and loading 24 hours per day 7 days per week. This level of operation is ridiculous and would be untenable for all residents in the vicinity of the railway line or close to the quarry. I believe that most of the quarry material should be transported by rail but at levels that do not require night loading. The extreme noise and the lighting required to load this material would be incredibly disruptive. Noise buffers should be used to reduce the impact on residents. Currently rail carriages are not covered when transporting this material

which means that families living on the rail route would be exposed to silica dust which we know is carcinogenic.

The Department of Planning, Industry and **Environment** should enforce the 1991 consent of 300.000 tonnes per annum as this is a figure that is more sustainable for both the environment and the communities who live near the quarry or along the train line. The vast majority of this should be moved by rail rather than road trucks.

The profitability for a huge company should not be the first consideration for the department. The health, wellbeing and social fabric of impacted communities and ensuring some protection of the environment for future generations is of paramount importance when considering this proposal.

I have not made a reportable political donation.

Regards

Kate Mitchell