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To: The Director Resource Assessments

Re: **Objection** to the Stone Ridge Quarry Project SSD- 10432

I **object** to the proposal for the Stone Ridge Quarry Project (SSD – 10432) for multiple reasons.

This project proposed by ARDG is within the Wallaroo State Forest. A disturbance area of 79ha is under consideration. The amount of material to be removed over a 30year period will comprise 1.5 million tonnes per year. Part of the site was previously in years past a small quarry site. The EIS Report states that there are 20 other quarries in State Forests of NSW. None of these quarries are anywhere near the size of this proposal. Will if this is approved to go ahead be a precedent for an expansion of other small quarries and the destruction of other sites?? State Forests were established originally for the planting and harvesting of trees not the decimation of a large section of ridge line which will ultimately be extremely difficult to regenerate.

The EIS states that the quarry is a ‘rare opportunity’. It is **not** . There are a number of quarries in the near vicinity. Boral is directly opposite. It is operating and is currently preparing reports to upgrade the annual tonnage it can remove and lower the pit floor level. Eagleton closer to the Pacific Highway is also preparing to seek approval to recommence operation. These quarries are all within 1 km of Stone Ridge along Italia Rd. Along with these are a number of quarries north of Italia Rd at Booral, Limeburners Ck and a number of operating quarries at Karuah. This resource is not rare. Due to the close proximity of the other Italia Rd quarries all social and biodiversity impacts are cumulative 2 to 3 times over.

The number of trucks and dogs and heavy equipment on Italia Rd as well as the intersection of Pacific Highway makes the area already dangerous. Italia Rd is already used by many residents of West Ward Port Stephens as well as local residents as an access to the Pacific Highway to Newcastle or the Central Coast and onwards to Sydney. This road along with school buses with parents dropping off and collecting children in vehicles is already congested. Added to that the cumulative impact of many trucks from these quarries will lead to an even more intolerable and dangerous situation. While the acceleration and deceleration slip lanes to be constructed onto and exiting the highway are commendable the additional heavy vehicles moving along the highway will lead to more congestion along the M1 downstream at road intersections, Heatherbrae roundabout, Tomago traffic lights along with the Hexham intersection with the New England Highway the danger of an already dangerous section of major road. The section of the Pacific Highway at Tomago is already listed as being in the top 10 most dangerous sections of road in NSW. This is going to make it worse. Add to that the quarries operating with truck and dog transport north of

Stone Ridge which will also beheading south to Sydney and Central Coast. The Umwelt report used road data from Taree many kilometres north on the Pacific Highway and many years old. These numbers were very wrong and very much reduced the numbers of vehicles both heavy and cars that use the section of the Pacific Highway every day. Traffic counters were available for Tomago in 2021 on the Traffic NSW website.

The social impacts on local residents and local fauna due to quarry operations will be quite significant. The residents of the area commented on the biodiversity, flora and fauna of the area which they have always enjoyed and appreciated. The affects of noise from vehicles and machinery, dust and reduction in air quality, lighting at night, night noise which is more intrusive, from the loading of trucks till 10pm, blasting, vibration, crushing till 6pm, and for fauna the erection of security fencing all lead to stress and health impacts both human and fauna. Stress for koalas from habitat destruction leads to disease including Chlamydia and Koala Retrovirus. The ambience of the area will be a thing of the past.

The EIS states that the site had **not** been affected by the 2019 to 2020 bushfires that decimated large parts of the east coast of NSW and also lead to deaths or badly injured thousands and thousands of native fauna including koalas as well as thousands of hectares of vegetation. Surely the fact that the area was not burnt or significantly affected means that it is even more important to preserve and protect the site.

The 79ha site is comprised of native vegetation with many plant community types including one endangered PCT. Within these plant communities are large numbers of koala food and shelter trees found in the Port Stephens area. The biodiversity report states that the area is marginal koala habitat based on a 2003 report. It is obviously very out of date and is irrelevant. 20 years later the area is no longer marginal and 2 koalas were spotted during fauna surveys in 2022. With the Koala being identified as endangered and Port Stephens Koalas numbering approximately 250 in the wild (down from thousands 20yrs ago) the preservation of this site is vital. It has been stated that koalas in Port Stephens and in NSW are “on the brink”. It was also stated within the EIS that the disturbance area will impact on habitat corridors for many species. The corridor will narrow to a 250m strip beside Italia Rd where the vegetation will not be touched. I wonder how the fauna , not just koalas , will cope with the truck movements from 3 quarries?? More road kill both on the road and within on the quarry roads. The fragmentation of populations will lead to a further decrease in the numbers of many species. This fragmentation will also have knock on effects in the remaining area of Wallaroo State Forest and Wallaroo National Park which the Project connects.

The Biodiversity Report states endangered species will likely be significantly affected (koala, grey headed flying fox) while other species may significantly be affected (swift parrot, spotted tailed quoll, yellow bellied glider, S.E. glossy black cockatoo.) Surely even more reason that the project should not proceed.

The Staged clearing with an ecologist onsite for pre clearance surveys, supervision of the clearing and relocation of species is ridiculous. Can an ecologist relocate an endangered plant community type or endangered orchids before being ploughed under by heavy machinery?? It has been shown previously that the relocation of koalas leads

to stress and disease, infertility, mortality and generally leads to the demise of koalas. It does not work. Biodiversity credits are also used as a means of discounting the destruction of 79ha. The green washing is also very apparent with the stewardship of a site in Wallaroo State Forest, the planting and improvement of a small area - improving one smaller area while completely destroying another larger area. Leave the original 79ha as it is.

The statement that “large areas of habitat nearby” is also another ridiculous assertion. These areas listed are not all in close proximity and this statement is simply trying to reduce the consequences of the destruction of the vegetation of the Stone Ridge.

In justifying the project ARDG states

“with the possible exception of potential impacts on biodiversity values, the Project will have relatively minor environmental and social impacts” EIS p.185

From this statement it is obvious that ARDG consider that the destruction of the environment along with the impacts on the residents of both the local area and other residents of Port Stephens are inconsequential. Their quest for profit is paramount and negates any other argument or issues raised.

The proponents consider the destruction of biodiversity is “largely unavoidable”. (EIS p.185)

The positives the proponents continually repeat is the amount of gravel that will be removed, money from value adding, money in wages, and a mere 176 jobs. No mention of course of the profits the project will generate for ARDG. But what about the costs to the local residents the damage to houses, medical bills, vet bills because of poor air quality, damage to vehicles etc?

ARDG believe that the local residual environmental impacts are “likely to be immaterial” p.186 What about the intergenerational consequences from the project? Will future generations be able to see a koala in the wild?? Or will the koalas of Port Stephens become extinct and just a picture in a book showing what once was. I would like my grandchildren and future generations to be able to see the environment as it should be not destroyed by companies with an **ultimate goal of making profits and the environment be damned.**

Children in NSW schools are taught to be environmentally aware and the need for conservation of our precious environment. However when they view what is happening in reality I wonder how they view the hypocrisy of their world and the destruction of their future along with the obvious quest for profits over everything else.

Once again I **strongly object** to the Stone Ridge Quarry Project and the destruction of 79ha of native vegetation along with the destruction of koala habitat and many other vulnerable and endangered species that live or move through that area. The consequences of the project on residents and the wider population of west ward and the downstream effects on the safety of those who travel the Pacific Highway

I declare that I have not made any political donations in the last 2 years.
I acknowledge and accept the department’s disclaimer and declaration.

Christine Winnett