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December 11, 2023

Wilpinjong Coal Mine

Submission of Objection SSD-6764-Mod-2

Introduction: I am writing this submission on behalf of ECCO, Environmentally Concerned Citizens of Orange. One of the roles of ECCO is to support local and regional groups who are impacted by decisions and practices which are inappropriate and detrimental to environmental outcomes. One such is the proposal by Peabody Coal to demolish a number of houses within the Wollar Village, whilst simultaneously applying to build a temporary miners' camp on the Wilpinjong Coal mine site. ECCO strongly objects to this proposal. It is not in the public interest and will have detrimental social and environmental impacts.

ECCO objects to the proposed temporary workers' camp:

Effect on housing

It is common knowledge that New South Wales is currently going through a severe housing crisis. Large scale demolition of housing stock defies common sense as well as flying in the face of the NSW Housing Strategy, which focusses on the delivery of regional affordable housing. It does not make sense to demolish housing on one hand while seeking to build it on the other. A proposal to demolish real estate is also inconsistent with the Mid Western Regional Council Community Plan, which advocates the support of vibrant towns and villages. Peabody Coal should be made to contribute to the vibrancy of Wollar through renovating existing housing and building more permanent accommodation for its workforce to compensate for the social and environmental damage the mine has caused Wollar over the years of its operation.

After having purchased the houses in question, Wilpinjong has allowed them to deteriorate to the point where an excuse can be made for their demolition. This is contrary to the agreement that the mine is to mitigate the social impacts of the acquisition

by maintaining and managing any assets acquired by the company in the village. This has clearly not happened, hence the proposal to demolish said assets.

Environmental impacts

The proposal under consideration for the temporary camp concerns a facility which is to accommodate 100 individuals for five years. This has considerable implications for such issues as water consumption, waste removal and impact on the natural environment. There is also no environmental assessment of the impact of the proposal on the habitat of the critically endangered regent honeyeater, which the mine is obligated to preserve. This species is already on the brink. It cannot survive any further habitat disturbance.

According to the Social impact Management plan for the Wilpinjong Mine, after 2025, there will be a scaling down of operations, and a switch to rehabilitation mode. This would be an appropriate time to establish a smaller camp, There is no justification for this camp when Peabody Coal owns considerable property and houses in the district.

Wilpinjong's legacy

An outcome which would better serve the public interest is for Peabody coal to remedy the environmental and social destruction it has imposed on the community of Wollar by restoring the existing housing it seeks to demolish. It needs to repair some of the social damage caused to the Wollar community by constructing permanent housing in the village to accommodate its workers, and to leave for affordable housing once the mine has gone.

Significant Aboriginal cultural sites have been identified in areas of Crown land which should be excised from current mine approval. This will protect a significant area of woodland habitat. It is also desirable that there is a reduction in mining activity close to Wollar village. This will reduce its impact on the health and wellbeing of the residents of Wollar.

Conclusion

ECCO recommends that the proposal to establish a temporary workers camp on the Wilpinjong Mine site be rejected on the grounds that there is no justification for the establishment of such a facility when the opportunity to accommodate workers could be taken to honour previously agreed on asset restoration as well as the construction of additional permanent housing. The proposal should also be rejected on the grounds that the provision of temporary accommodation will have environmental impacts which have not been identified or addressed in the proposal.

Wilpinjong coal mine will eventually be a thing of the past. As previously stated, its operation will be scaled down within the next five years. It is time for rehabilitation and restoration, not for creating new unwelcome social and environmental concerns.

Yours sincerely

Neil Jones

President, Environmentally Concerned Citizens of Orange.