



Nature Conservation Council

The voice for nature in NSW

25 September 2025

Submission on HVO South Open Cut Coal Continuation Project SSD-11826621

To whom it may concern,

Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales (NCC) is the state's peak environment organisation. We represent over 200 environment groups across NSW. Together we are dedicated to protecting and conserving the wildlife, landscapes and natural resources of NSW.

NCC is concerned about the impacts of the HVO North and South Open Cut Coal Continuation Project SSD-11826681 and objects to the proposal due to climate change impacts and impacts on land and water resources.

Likely overshoot of NSW legislated emission reduction targets

This project would represent a very significant increase in direct emissions via expansion of the existing project. The expansion would double methane emissions compared to the existing mine (as at FY24) and then remain at elevated levels until 2042.

The additional 803 million tonnes of lifecycle greenhouse gas pollution between now and 2045 would mean likely overshoot of NSW legislated emission reduction targets in 2030 and 2035, unless other projects or sectors decarbonise more aggressively.

This is the biggest coal mine project ever proposed in NSW and would release 7 times the total annual emissions from all sources in New South Wales. The proposal comes as the NSW Joint Standing Committee for Net Zero Future is inquiring into fossil fuel emissions in the context of the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act and the EPA is consulting on proposals to more closely regulate emissions in coal mining.

The project fails to adequately assess local climate change impacts



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The NSW Court of Appeal recently overturned approval for the largest coal mine expansion in the state, Mt Pleasant, due to failure to consider climate harms on local communities.

The NSW Court of Appeal decision in Denman Aberdeen Muswellbrook Scone Healthy Environment Group v MACH Energy Australia Pty Ltd (2025) NSWCA 163 (Denman) carries implications for assessment of current and new coal projects statewide.

The ruling means that all coal expansion or extension proposals must resubmit comprehensive environmental impact statements that outline the expected climate change impacts on the local community because of emissions associated with the proposal. The EISs must be subject to public consultation with impacted communities per the ruling.

The consideration of emissions should include emissions from existing operations as well as proposed expansions or extensions as it is the totality of these emissions that contribute to climate change, with localised impacts.

To identify the extent to which localised climate change impacts would be exacerbated by proposals, proponents should be guided to employ globally accepted attribution science frameworks. It is unacceptable for projects, like the HVO North and South Open Cut Coal Continuation Project SSD-11826681 proposal, to claim that project impacts on climate change cannot be discerned or are immaterial in the context of climate change impacts under emissions pathways irrespective of whether the project is approved.

The Denman ruling must be respected to protect our communities of NSW from further devastating and compounding climate-fuelled floods, bushfires, heatwaves and drought.

Impacts to land and water

The proposed mine expansion will have devastating impacts on land and water in the Hunter Valley, adding to cumulative impacts from extensive mining activity in the region.

The HVO mine complex straddles the Hunter River, and the expansion intends to mine directly into strategic agricultural land and the river's alluvial aquifer.

Mining for the Continuation Project will worsen groundwater drawdown already affecting the Hunter River's alluvial aquifer by half a metre.



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Cumulative drawdown of Wollombi Brook alluvium will be up to 2 metres, and this impact will extend long after mining ceases.

Recent monitoring has identified that groundwater in the alluvium and other affected areas is exceeding water quality triggers in the HVO area. A large tailings storage dam adjacent to the river was found six years ago to be seeping into groundwater.

Mine not in the public interest

Economic benefits claimed in the mine EIS also do not stack up. NSW is going through a period of intense infrastructure and construction activity due to our state's priorities such as renewable energy infrastructure and the Hunter Transmission Project, housing, and roads projects. Given the tight jobs market, this mine would drive up costs and cause delays for these projects and create few employment benefits.

On the other hand, the harmful impacts to our climate, land, and water are severe and growing. The people of NSW are already suffering huge recovery costs from climate disasters, and these costs will continue to increase until NSW and all other jurisdictions stop approving the mining and burning of fossil fuels.

For all these reasons, we object to the proposal and recommend refusal.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. Your contact person at Nature Conservation Council of NSW is Senior Climate and Energy Campaigner, Jacqueline Mills.

Yours sincerely,

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