

Submission by John Smith objecting to the Wilpinjong Coal Mine Mod 3 – Pit 8 Extension

I am writing to object to the Wilpinjong Coal Mine Mod 3 – Pit 8 Extension.

First of all, this should be treated as a new project and be made to go through a full evaluation process as a new proposal, not an extension. It can hardly be an extension when it is outside the current lease area. It takes the mine right to the boundary of the Wollar township, and as a result, will make it impossible for the residents to rebuild their lives as they had sought to do with the original mining lease coming to the end of its life.

The physical and mental health of the residents has suffered extensively, and many have been forced off their land and out of the township due to the current mining arrangements, and the new proposal has exacerbated that stress. The dust and pollution, noise and contamination of land under the current mining will be continued and made worse under this proposal as it brings the mine right to the very doorstep of the town.

The area is significant for the Wiradjuri Aboriginal people who retain a continuous spiritual connection to the land. The expansion will lead to the destruction of 15 recorded sites.

In addition, it is a stalking horse for a much bigger expansion of mining in the area to the north, east, west and south-west of the town of Wollar and as such should be treated as a new project.

There are many grounds for my objection to this proposal in addition to the need to be treated as a new project.

The proposed extension will release a further 25 MT of additional Greenhouse Gas emissions. We are in a dual climate and ecological emergency, with temperatures rising and records being broken almost daily. Ecosystems are collapsing, such as the coral reefs, which are now believed to have passed their tipping point due to increasing sea temperatures, directly related to the addition of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Land-based ecosystems are likewise impacted by rising temperatures and the extreme weather events that accompany a warmer climate. Critical habitat for species and ecosystems is destroyed due to direct removal by projects such as open-cut mining, and by increased temperatures.

25 MT of additional greenhouse gas emissions may not seem a lot until you realise it is almost as much as the entire transport sector in NSW emits per year. Coal is a major contributor to climate heating and every extra bit of warming counts. There is no need for this coal.

The impacts on critically endangered species if this project proceeds will be catastrophic. Species of particular concern are endangered and vulnerable microbats, which have been affected by developments that have led to destruction of their roosting caves. These include the endangered Large-eared Pied Bat and vulnerable Eastern Cave Bat. The National

Recovery Plan¹ for the Large-eared Pied Bat notes that “the main known cause of decline in the species is the destruction of, and interference with maternity and other roosts”. This proposal will remove two rocky hills at the centre of this population hotspot, destroying known roosting sites. This impact is irreversible.

Other critically endangered species affected by this proposal include the Regent Honeyeater, known to be breeding in the district. There is also the koala which requires connection between the conservation area of Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve and Goulburn River National Park. Open-cut mining removes the connectivity of remnant vegetation in the landscape to enable wildlife to transit from one area to another. The proposal will also impact Box Gum Woodland, a critically endangered ecological community that has less than 5% of the original distribution remaining.² These woodlands are dependent on groundwater, and the project will cause groundwater drawdown of over 20 m, with a loss of flows to Wollar Creek of over 21 million litres per year. The disruption of groundwater flows also impacts areas downstream with increased salinity loads and diminished water quality from mine waste.

The Wollar area has been designated as the state’s first Renewable Energy Zone. The state is unlikely to meet its emissions reduction targets, yet it is allowing a climate polluting, landscape and species destroying open-cut coal mine to be built while supposedly transitioning to renewable energy. The hypocrisy is stark!

The project is not for the need of jobs as already there is a workforce shortage for renewable energy projects in the Central West.

The climate change impacts of flood damage, impacts on the wine and tourism industry, bushfires and heat stress wrought by the increased emissions vastly outweigh the paltry \$21 million identified public benefit of the project.

This is a sneaky attempt to go under the radar, to get a new project approved as an extension, thus avoiding proper evaluation and independent review.

The project should be rejected in its current form and made to resubmit as a new proposal and should undergo full independent evaluation.

Yours sincerely,

John Smith

¹ Department of Environment and Resource Management. 2011. National recovery plan for the large-eared pied bat *Chalinolobus dwyeri*. Report to the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Canberra

² NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee. **Notice of and reason for the Final Determination** White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely’s Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland as Critically Endangered Ecological Community. 17/7/2020