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Submission of Objection SSD 6764 Mod 3

Introduction

Wollar Progress Association ('the Association') is an incorporated, not-for-profit community representative organisation formed to encourage, and arrange for, the provision of facilities, amenities and services in the Wollar District so as to promote the well-being of residents or visitors to the district.

The Association is the Crown Land Manager for the Wollar Community Hall and Wollar Recreation Ground. The responsibilities to maintain facilities and organize social functions and events are undertaken by a group of dedicated volunteers who reside in or have property in the Wollar district.

The Wollar Community Hall has been designated a Neighbourhood Safe Place by the NSW Rural Fire Service to be used in the case of evacuations during major emergencies. The facilities are maintained through fundraising and grants.

The Association strongly objects to any further expansion of the Wilpinjong Coal Mine because of the cumulative social impact. The depopulation of the Wollar community since property purchases commenced as early as 1998 on behalf of the developing company, Excell, has not been adequately assessed or acknowledged.

The proposal to bring open cut mining operations to the northern boundary of Wollar Village is objectionable. The assessment of this proposal as a modification of the Wilpinjong Extension Project cannot be justified as there are substantial differences in the impacts that have not been adequately assessed. This proposal is the first stage of a much larger development¹ and should be assessed as such.

¹ <https://wilpinjongmine.com.au/future-plans/>

The Association does not support assessment conclusions submitted with the development application that potential impacts on amenity and community well-being will be similar or of low ranking.

The Wollar district is now experiencing the establishment of major renewable energy projects including Wollar Solar Farm, Goulburn River Solar Farm and the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. These projects do not generate the level of environmental pollution produced by the Wilpinjong Coal Mine opencut mining operations ie noise, dust, blasts, spontaneous combustion, diesel emissions, train movements and increased carbon emissions.

The Association does not support the contention that the proposed coal mine expansion is in the public interest and recommends that the application be rejected.

Key Issues of Objection

The Association bases this strong objection on the following key issues:

1. Poor assessment of environmental pollution
2. First stage of larger expansion
3. Inadequate assessment of social impacts
4. Lack of cumulative impact assessment
5. Exclusion of Cumbo Creek realignment and Rocky Hill Complex
6. Impacts on the natural environment
7. Contrary to renewable energy expansion

1. Poor assessment of environmental pollution

The lack of acknowledgment in regard to the proximity of the proposal to Wollar Village and the expansion of 24 hour, seven days per week open cut mining operations moving closer to remaining private property owners and to mine owned residences housing leasees and mine workers is a key failing of the assessment.

The description of the proposal refers to satellite ROM pads² for longer distance extraction. However, these have not been identified or assessed for increased noise or dust emissions. The original Pit 8 proposal under the Wilpinjong Extension Project (WEP) had identified an additional ROM pad at the northern end of the pit. This was not included in the final mine design. The impacts of satellite or new permanent ROM pads has not been adequately addressed.

1.1 Noise and Blasting Assessment (Appendix A)

Noise has been the major impact on the Wollar community causing depopulation and severe social impacts. The ongoing acquisition of properties since the approval of Wilpinjong Coal Mine in 2006 has primarily been related to unmanageable noise impacts.

The incremental depopulation of the district with each modification and mine expansion over time has resulted in the closure of Wollar Public School, closure of Wollar General Store and loss of services.

² Attachment 9 Consolidated Project Description pp 5, 9, 11,

The proposed mitigation of increased noise pollution emitted from the Pit 8 extension through management of machinery and mining operations has not been effective in the past and has generally caused increased, unassessed social impacts.

The lack of acknowledgement of noise impacts as a key driver of the depopulation of the Wollar district is a failure of the noise impact assessment and mitigation process. There are numerous problems with the noise assessment conducted for the proposed expansion of Wilpinjong Mine operations to the northern border of Wollar Village.

1.1.1 Noise model inputs

1.1.1.1 Meteorology

The standard noise enhancing meteorological conditions are:

- Daytime/evening stability categories A – D with light winds (up to 3m/s at 10 m AGL)
- Night-time stability categories A – D with light winds (up to 3m/s at 10 m AGL) and/or stability category F with light winds (up to 2m/s at 10 m AGL)³

The assessment has not taken the precautionary approach and has attempted to minimise noise impact predictions by only using very low wind speeds in the model. No noise enhancing meteorological conditions are assessed for the daytime or evening periods and the night-time noise enhancing meteorological conditions for stability category F uses light winds of only 1m/s at 10 m AGL.

The report claims that noise enhancing conditions are insignificant in the area and that the approach taken is more representative of actual noise levels at noise sensitive receivers.⁴

This approach is in direct contradiction to the information used in the Air Quality Impact Assessment (Appendix B) that identifies mean wind speeds in the district to be over 2m/s and the percentage of calms (0.5m/s) being 20% or less. Measurements taken at the Wilpinjong meteorological station between 2018 and 2023 were used.⁵

Appendix C of the Noise Assessment Report outlines that the data set used to determine noise enhancing conditions was collected from the same weather station for the period January 2020 to December 2024. The report concludes that ‘ *It is expected that WCPL would manage noise emissions during the very infrequent occurrence of moderate to strong inversions in combination with 2m/s light winds with the use of their proactive noise management system.*’⁶

Comments on the noise management system are made further on in this submission.

1.1.1.2 Low Frequency Noise (LFN)

The assessment of one - third octave band levels are not conducted as required under the Policy for Industrial Noise for the frequencies 10 Hz to 160 Hz. Instead frequencies from 31.5 to 16 kHz were used.

³ RWDI 13 August 2025. Noise and Blasting Assessment, Table 6-1 p23

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Arien Consulting 13 August 2025 Air Quality Assessment, Table 5 P10

⁶ Noise and Blasting Assessment Appendix C p C 5

Disturbance from LFN has been an ongoing issue and cause of complaint by residents in the Wollar district. The LFN assessment was based only on representative receivers and indicated that all receivers would be exposed to unbalanced spectra (10 Hz – 20 Hz) containing ‘dominant’ components in the low frequency range of the spectrum.

Receivers were broken into zones with no reason given for property placement within zones. The only zones provided with a 2dB penalty are zones 7 and 9 – both containing properties with agreements to not complain about noise intrusion. Properties 60A and 60B should be included in Zone 9 because they are closer to that area than the properties in the allocated Zone 8.

The assessment of LFN for the proposed expansion to the east is inadequate and biased.

1.1.1.3 Model Calibration

The calibration of the predictive noise model was based on short-term real time monitoring at two sites in the district on two nights at each site in May and June 2024. The result based on these 15 min measurements of noise is the conclusion that the model is over-predicting noise. This has caused a calibration of – 2dB for noise enhancing night-time conditions.

As described under 1.1.1.1 the wind speeds used in the model are already compromised for night-time noise enhancing conditions.

It is concerning that the real-time monitoring results collected across the noise monitor network have not been used to verify the model calibration.

The 2024 Annual Report identified that noise levels were underpredicted for two attended monitoring sites: N6 and N20 under ‘strong inversion conditions’ in June and July 2024.⁷

The Association considers that the model calibration is based on incorrect inputs and that the subtraction of 2 dB from night-time noise enhancing condition is a bias that has caused incorrect noise predictions for the Mod 3 proposal.

1.1.2 Noise Mitigation Measures

The pro-active noise mitigation measures require shutting down, relocating or altering the fleet of mining machinery. Because of the issues raised with the inputs to the predictive model, the Association considers the indicative information provided in Table 6.4 is vastly optimistic. This is especially in the years when the bulk of the operations are in the proposed Pit 8 extension.

It is noted that properties 103, 104 and 153 are expected to receive exceedances of night-time noise criteria under noise enhancing conditions. The Association expects that properties 60A and 60B will also be in this category, being much closer to the operations than 153. Properties 105, 107 and above will also receive louder mine noise. Noise complaints have regularly been lodged as far away as property 120. This is an indication of increased annoyance and loss of amenity and well-being.

The approach to noise management from Wilpinjong Mine leads to increased social impacts and pressure from the mining company to sell up or sign an agreement. This pattern has been experienced with each major expansion of the mine and is expected to continue with this

⁷ Peabody 31 March 2025. 2024 Annual Review. Wilpinjong Coal Mine p26

proposed Pit 8 extension because it brings the mine closer to all remaining privately owned properties in the district. This noise mitigation approach has been the main cause of the depopulation of the community. Many properties not identified as impacted by noise in the predictive model have been acquired over time because of noise non-compliance.

A more realistic assessment of the loss of production caused by noise management should inform the economic viability of the proposal and the increase in social impacts.

1.1.3 Other noise related matters

1.1.3.1 Noise levels at Wollar Community Hall

The noise assessment identifies that no noise criteria was set for the Community Hall under the current WEP approval. The amenity noise level for active recreation areas has been used being 55 dB day/evening/night. This decision fails to recognise that Wollar Community Hall is a designated Neighbourhood Safe Place that would house evacuated community members during emergencies, including sleeping overnight. The increase in extreme weather events, particularly major bushfires, is a likely scenario causing the Neighbourhood Safe Place to be activated more regularly.

The Association considers that the amenity noise criteria for Wollar Community Hall should be set at no higher than 45dB as per the current WEP approval for Wollar School (Table 5-3). This would set the project amenity noise level as 40 dB and the project noise trigger level at 43 dB.

1.1.3.2 Cumulative Noise Assessment

The cumulative noise assessment, although acknowledging that noise from neighbouring mines was not included in the current WEP approval and is unlikely to impact private landholders, has attributed an additional 3dB to the amenity noise levels for all properties. This has been added to the general noise amenity criteria and not to the project specific noise amenity criteria. This approach has resulted in a cumulative noise level of 58 dB at the Community Hall and is totally unacceptable.

The Association considers that the addition of cumulative noise criteria for a proposal moving away from the other two mining operations is unnecessary.

1.1.3.3 Wollar Recreation Ground

The Wollar Recreation Ground has not been identified in the noise impact assessment as a community facility in Wollar Village.

1.1.3.4 Land Area Noise Criteria

The assessment has incorrectly used the cumulative noise criteria rather than the required amenity noise criteria to identify the land area noise criteria as described in Table 5.9

1.1.3.5 New landowners in Wollar Village

The Mudgee Local Aboriginal Lands Council has recently received title to three blocks in Wollar Village through a successful lands claim. The noise assessment has failed to assess the noise impacts of the proposed Mod 3 at these new privately owned blocks.

The Lands Council has aspirations to build on these blocks to enable Aboriginal people to move back to the Wollar area. This is part of the community's desire to rebuild to address the depopulation and social impacts attributable over the last 20 years to the Wilpinjong Coal Mine.

1.1.4 Blasting impacts

The Association notes at Fig 10 – 2 that the Wollar Community Hall and the unidentified Wollar Recreation Ground fall within the minimum compliance distance for a MIC 1350kg blast.

The management of blasting impacts for Mod 3 is likely to cause the use of lower impact blasts more regularly. This impact of reduced blast size on mining operations and ability to produce product coal in the volumes predicted has not been assessed in regard to the viability of the proposed Pit 8 extension. The alternative is that community facilities will be damaged through the ongoing use of high impact blasts.

1.2 Air Quality Assessment

The Association strongly disagrees with the conclusion that the *'Modification is unlikely to affect air quality beyond the range of historically measured fluctuations of key air quality indicators around the region.'*⁸

Dust pollution in private residences and community facilities in the district has become increasingly evident as the Wilpinjong Mine operations progress in Pit 8. The proposed extension of Pit 8 brings those operations and unmanaged dust emissions to the northern border of Wollar Village and closer to remaining private residences in the district.

The Wollar Recreation Ground has not been included in the assessment. It is the closest community facility to the proposed area of expansion. Increased air pollution at a site where outdoor sports can be played is a threat to human health that has not been considered.

The statement that *'the predicted impacts are likely to over-state actual impacts to some extent'*⁹ is not supported by the information presented in the Air Quality Report and is contested by the Association for the following reasons.

1.2.1 Bias in air quality model

The Association strongly objects that the years 2022/23 have been chosen as representative of normal weather conditions and that this was extrapolated by considering only 2018 – 2023.

The years 2022 – 23 were abnormally wet years where levels of dust emissions were lower. These years are not appropriate to use as background levels.¹⁰ The model has excluded years of elevated air quality levels because they are *'largely driven by extraordinary events or extreme climatic conditions (or both)'*¹¹

The Association considers that the likelihood of increased intensive extreme climate conditions over the time of the proposed Mod 3 will cause an increase in elevated air quality levels. The

⁸ Arien Consulting 13 August 2025 Air Quality Assessment, Executive Summary pv

⁹ Ibid p 20

¹⁰ Ibid Table 11 p 15

¹¹ Ibid p 12

addition of mine dust emissions on top of drought and bushfire is a cumulative impact that should not be ignored.

The mine experienced severe water shortages in the intensive 2018 – 19 drought that impacted dust suppression capability. Drought years should be included in the assessment of air quality. The use of extreme wet years as representative of background air quality levels as opposed to using extreme dry years is a bias in the air quality assessment that disadvantages community health and well-being.

The consideration of years for determining a representative background should have considered a longer period of time from 2012 – 2024.

The air quality impacts from expanding open cut mining operations further to the east and to the border of Wollar Village have been under predicted.

1.2.2 Predictions for Wollar Village and private residences

The map used to identify air quality impacts on community and private property is different to the property map used in the Modification Report and in the Noise and Blasting Assessment Report. It does not identify all private property in the district likely to be impacted and does not identify all community facilities in the Wollar Village.

The Association is concerned that even with the bias in the predictive modelling, Fig 15 (Modelled annual average PM₁₀ due to Wilpinjong Coal Mine and other sources) demonstrates that in 2032 it is likely that Wollar Village will be impacted by the top limit of annual average emissions. This indicates that at times the air quality will exceed these limits. This is particularly of concern for the Wollar Recreation Ground and Wollar Community Hall.

It is of greater concern that Fig 17 (Modelled maximum 24 hour average PM_{2.5} due to Wilpinjong Coal Mine and other sources) demonstrates that in 2032 the community facilities will be within the range of the maximum PM_{2.5} 24 hour average limit. Because this is an average prediction there will be times when the limit is exceeded. This is of particular concern for users of the Wollar Community Hall and Wollar Recreation Ground. No level of PM_{2.5} is safe for human health. The proposed Mod 3 is a threat to human health and should not be approved.

1.2.3 Lack of air pollution monitoring

1.2.3.1 Nitrous Dioxide (NO₂)

It is of concern that the closest monitor of NO₂ is at Merriwa. The cumulative impact of blasting emissions from both Wilpinjong Mine (2 blasts/day, 5 blasts/week) and Moolarben Mine (2 blasts/day, 9 blasts/week) is not being adequately monitored.

Concentrations of NO₂ can be associated with diesel exhaust and post-blast fume emissions. The volume of diesel emissions from both mining equipment and from trains is not clearly quantified, monitored or assessed.

The Association considers that the level of NO₂ in the Wollar district are much higher than predicted in the Air Quality Report and are likely to cause health impacts such as respiratory disease.

1.2.3.2 Total suspended particulate matter (TSP)

It is disturbing that TSP is not monitored in the vicinity of the Wilpinjong Coal Mine. The air quality assessment relies on estimations developed by the NSW Minerals Council, hardly an independent authority. The concentration of coal mining activities in the locality, including coal trains from the three mines passing through the Wollar district in the vicinity of the village and rural residences, indicates that TSP could be at much higher levels than estimated.

The current monitoring requirements for dust deposition from coal mining are outdated and unreliable. Wollar district residents are experiencing high levels of dust deposition, including within community facilities. Wollar Community Hall is regularly coated with dust internally to an increasingly higher level than experienced over a long period of time.

The proposal to mine to the boundary of Wollar Village will increase the levels of TSP. This is a significant issue for health and well-being and an impost on volunteers having to regularly clean the Hall from heavy dust deposits before public events.

1.2.3.3 Diesel exhaust

There is no reference to the assessment of diesel exhaust from trains entering and departing from Wilpinjong Mine. The cumulative impact of train movements and diesel exhaust emissions from the three coal mines is not assessed.

1.2.4 Spontaneous Combustion

The Air Quality Report recognises that spontaneous combustion has been a high source of annoyance for the community with regular complaints. The Association considers that the Spontaneous Combustion Management Plan has not protected the community from the impacts of this source of pollution. The nuisance of odour and potential health impacts have not been adequately managed. This is an ongoing issue for Wilpinjong mining operations.

The fact that the proposed extension of Pit 8 would involve extraction of the same coal seams currently mined indicates that spontaneous combustion will be an ongoing problem. People using Mogo Road as residents or visitors to Goulburn River National Park will have to drive past the mine workings from the Wollar Village direction. Unmanaged spontaneous combustion, particularly on damp winter mornings, has been a nuisance for passing motorists experiencing odour.

The mitigation measures outlined in Section 6.7.3 fail to recognise that spontaneous combustion has been an ongoing issue over the life of the mine.

1.3 Landscape Character and Visual Impacts

The assessment of landscape character and visual impacts of the proposed mine expansion is very poor. The assessment fails to identify the significant nature of the proposed impacts on visual amenity and the intrusion of open cut mining into the Wollar Creek valley and to the boundary of Wollar Village. The conclusions do not describe the intensity of this intrusion or the social impacts through loss of amenity to both local residents and visitors to the district.

The conclusion that Landscape Characteristic Impact is moderate¹² and the overall visual sensitivity and visual impact is low¹³ is misleading and not based on any available concrete evidence.

The description of Wollar Village as LCZ 4 fails to identify the Wollar Recreation Ground, a crown land reserve managed by Wollar Progress Association which is very close to the area proposed to be disturbed. It also fails to identify the three blocks of land now privately owned by the Mudgee Local Aboriginal Lands Council through a recent successful lands claim.

The assessment correctly identifies that the sensitivity for LCZ 4 is high, however then considers the magnitude of the impact to be low. This does not account for the visual disturbance from dust and blast emissions and the landscape disturbance of removing the hills and grazing land during mining operations

The three viewpoints used to assess the visual impacts are misleading and do not represent the true nature of the activities or the disturbance at each site.

Viewpoint 1 (Fig 29) shows a static view of Pit 8 with no indication of large truck movements and in pit visibility that is currently causing visual impact on the Ulan-Wollar Road. The visual impact for passing motorists is very sensitive and very high.

Viewpoint 2 (Fig 30) is very misleading in that it does not portray the visual impact at the intersection of Mogo Rd with Ulan-Wollar Road. This intersection will be closer to the rail line, if the realignment of Ulan-Wollar Road goes ahead. The intersection will have views directly at the mining operations, including the removal of the rocky outcrop directly adjacent to intersection.

Visitors to the Goulburn River National Park who use Mogo Road as the only access to the reserve will be impacted by the views of landscape disturbance, as will local residents on inholdings within the reserve. The viewpoint sensitivity is very high, the overall visual sensitivity is very high, the visual magnitude is very high and the visual impact is very high.

Viewpoint 3 (Fig 31) is misleading in that it does not show the full extent of the potential impact of the proposed mining operations. Interestingly the photos show a dust cloud from the direction of current mining activity. The expectation is that the visual impacts of the proposed expansion on Wollar Village and surrounds will include a highly visible dust cloud.

The viewpoint indicates an infrastructure area, as does Fig 11 (Provisional General Arrangements for 2030) with a top soil stock pile, and Fig 12 (2032). There is no description within the assessment of what the infrastructure area will contain in regard to buildings, car parks, heavy vehicle laydown and other major changes to the landscape. This will cause a high level of visual impact on the edge of the village.

The Association considers that this proposed infrastructure arrangement is possibly part of the planning for the larger proposed expansion into Pit 9 and Pit 10.

Barigan Street is a main route for people travelling to Goulburn River National Park and local residents travelling to and from the village from Mogo Road. Driving past the visual pollution of opencut mining operations and infrastructure has a very high viewpoint sensitivity.

¹² Peabody Energy (undated) Modification Report Table 31 p153

¹³ Ibid Table 32 p 154

The proposal will generate very high overall visual sensitivity, very high visual magnitude and very high visual impact from the viewpoint of Wollar Village.

1.4 Light pollution

The impact of night light pollution extending further to the east and closer to Wollar Village and to remaining private properties has not been adequately addressed. The mobile lighting equipment has caused impacts on motorists when placed alongside roads. The permanent all night glow is disturbing both to humans and native species. There is no assessment of the impact of closer night time lights on residents in Wollar Village and on surrounding properties , or on nocturnal native animals.

2. First stage of larger expansion

The Association considers that this proposal should not be assessed as a modification of the existing approval but as the first stage of a larger new expansion project that is currently under assessment. This is identified in the Modification Report: *'Approval of the Modification would therefore support the contribution of ROM coal extraction and employment levels while WCP evaluates opportunities to develop a future Wilpinjong Coal Mine SSD extension proposal (eg in EL 9399)'*¹⁴

This is stepped out very clearly on the Peabody Wilpinjong website¹⁵ where the current application is described as Stage One and the proposed expansion as Stage Two under the title 'Project Timeline'.

Information on the larger expansion has also been provided to the Wilpinjong Coal Mine Community Consultative Committee (CCC): CCC minutes 3 September 2025:

Enquiry: "when the scoping letter for Pits 9 & 10 (SSD project) will be lodged with DPHI. Advised, that the most current update is probably Q3 2025"

Question: *When is Pit 9 and 10 project looking at being submitted?*

Answer: *Estimated early 2029.* (This response is incorrect when compared with information on the Wilpinjong Mine website).

The map provided to the CCC clearly demonstrates that this current proposed expansion is critical in providing the first stage of a much larger expansion that surrounds the Wollar Village and extends open cut mining environmental impacts further to the east. This creates two major issues for consideration. One is that Mod 3 – Pit 8 extension is not substantially the same as the current approval under the WEP. The other is that this proposal creates ongoing social impacts and uncertainty for the future of the remaining residents in the Wollar community.

The application for only a six month extension of approval limit while proposing to mine 16 mtpa up to December 2033 is impossible to achieve full rehabilitation outcomes. This is a clear indication that Peabody fully intend to continue mining beyond 2034, possibly for another 10 years.

¹⁴ Ibid Executive Summary p ES-1

¹⁵ <https://wilpinjongmine.com.au/future-plans/>

This current expansion proposal must be assessed as the first stage of a larger project, as identified by Peabody, not as a modification to existing operations.

2.1 Not substantially the same project

The current proposal under consideration is substantially different to the approved mine operations under SSD 6764 because it is disturbing 155 ha of a new area of land that mostly falls outside the current mine lease. The new area moves the mining operations away from the Wilpinjong Creek catchment into the Wollar Creek catchment and directly encroaches on the Wollar Village. There will be no ridgeline protecting the village and properties to the east from mine pollution in the form of additional noise, blasts, dust, spontaneous combustion and lighting. The extended period of full production will prevent the anticipated reduction in train and traffic movements.

The new area of mine disturbance will cause additional loss of Aboriginal culture and connection to country, destruction of critical endangered species habitat and new impacts on water sources. For example, the Surface Water Assessment Report states that '*The Modification has the potential to cause impacts beyond the impacts of the approved operation.*'¹⁶

The application to extract an additional 14 Mt coal over a similar time frame demonstrates the inadequacy of the prediction of coal production under the current approval. This raises questions about the information provided on which the public benefit and economic viability of the WEP was based. Approvals for this mining operation have been consistently based on over-predictions of coal resource and associated public benefit.

2.2 Ongoing social impacts and uncertainty

The Wilpinjong Coal Mine has had a profound social impact on the Wollar community causing the depopulation of the district to the point of causing the Public School to close, the General Store to become unviable, the loss of both Churches and all services available to the community prior to the mine approval in 2006.

The Wollar community is in the process of rebuilding and reinvigorating social activities with new volunteers for the Cumbo Bushfire Brigade and Wollar Progress Association. The Mudgee Local Aboriginal Lands Council has been granted title to the Wollar Travelling Stock Route and three blocks on the south western edge of the village.

The current Social Impact Management Plan (SIMP) identifies that operations at Wilpinjong Coal Mine would commence winding back this year (2025) with predicted workforce reduction. A gradual decrease in mine disturbance and associated environmental pollution has been anticipated by the community to cause an improvement in amenity, health and well-being.

The SIMP identifies this predicted decrease in activity in a number of places:

¹⁶ WRM 8 August 2025. Surface Water Assessment Pit 8 Extension Modification p 121

Operational employment at WCM is expected to decline from 2025 (p 21)

The closure of WCM will be welcomed by the Village of Wollar residents and may be viewed as an opportunity for progressive regeneration of the area. (p 22)

Aspirations identified during consultation for the SIMP referred to a property buy-back scheme from WCM to increase local private ownership, and the introduction of further housing development and land management enterprises. (p 22)

Amenity and social character: The closure of WCM will be welcomed by some existing and former Wollar residents, and may be viewed as an opportunity for progressive regeneration of the area. (p 88 Table A11).

These statements appear in the current SIMP v4 (September 2024) approved by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure in May 2025. This review of the SIMP was conducted in breach of WEP condition 68 with no consultation with the CCC or Wollar community. The updated SIMP includes a reference to the mine expansion:

WCPL is proposing to modify Development Consent (SSD-6764) for the Wilpinjong Coal Mine to facilitate extensions of the existing Pits 3 and 8 (referred to as the Pits 3 and 8 Extension areas) within Exploration Licences (EL) 9399 and EL 6169 and development of associated supporting infrastructure and facilities. Modification 3 (MOD 3) would provide access to some additional coal to maintain the existing ROM coal production profile and current workforce at the Wilpinjong Coal Mine until approximately 2033, rather than a ramp down of the workforce in 2025 as identified in this SIMP. (p 6)

This proposed mine expansion as first stage of the larger development of Pit 9 and Pit 10 is now creating significant social impact, increased levels of stress, uncertainty, and fear for the future amongst remaining community members. While this is mentioned in passing in the Social Impact Assessment (Appendix K) it is not adequately assessed. More comment on the adequacy of this assessment is provided in Appendix A of this submission.

The Social Impact Assessment does identify that if the mine expansion does not proceed there would be significantly more positive social benefits than negative. (Table 12 p 44).

The seven positive outcomes include: no further acquisition of property by Peabody, no additional demands on accommodation, no additional loss of cultural heritage, no additional loss of amenity, no additional visual impact, reduced impact on farming opportunities, reduction in uncertainty.

The three negative outcomes associated with employment opportunities and protection of the Rocky Hill Complex are dealt with in later sections of this submission.

2.3 Lack of cumulative impact assessment

The social impacts of the three large coal mining operations in the region and other nearby mining projects are not adequately assessed or identified. The loss of population between Ulan and Bylong is directly attributable to land acquisition by mining companies.

The depopulation of an entire region has caused highly significant social impacts through loss of neighbours, agricultural services and access to fuel and other services. The closure of the Ulan, Wollar and Bylong General Stores has caused social and economic disadvantage in the region. The closure of Ulan, Wollar and Bylong Public Schools has restricted educational opportunities for families wanting to move back to the area.

Wollar community is now a small island within a largely depopulated region. The aspirations of the community to rebuild and restore services and activities must not be further threatened. All aspects of the assessment of this proposal to expand the Wilpinjong Coal mine fail to adequately assess cumulative impact including biodiversity, cultural heritage, water sources, pollution and the options available for economic diversification in the region

3. Cumbo Creek Realignment and Rocky Hill exclusion offsets

The Association strongly objects to the repeated emphasis throughout the application documents on the exclusion of the Cumbo Creek realignment and the approved destruction of the Rocky Hill Aboriginal cultural heritage complex from mining. While it is agreed that not mining these areas is a good outcome, we do not agree that a Modification of the WEP is required for these exclusions to occur.

Peabody has no intention of investing in the realignment of Cumbo Creek, even though there has been approval to do this since the original determination in 2006. The CCC has been informed that *'Discussion regarding Cumbo Creek and the intensions behind why it won't be mined.*

*It is expensive to do to ensure compliance with current standards, and it requires more time than is realistically available, as well as provides a better environmental outcome'*¹⁷

It is important that the sensitive cultural values of the Rocky Hill Complex be protected and many community objections to the WEP expansion identified cumulative loss of Aboriginal cultural heritage as a key issue. However, Peabody Energy could make this decision to protect a significant cultural heritage area, that should not have been approved for destruction, without requiring a modification of the current approval.

The use of these two exclusions as offsets for the proposed expansion of open cut mining into a new area of disturbance to access a further 14 Mt of coal is unacceptable and disingenuous. The calculation that 7 Mt of coal will be left in the ground is highly speculative and cannot be relied upon to generate the offset calculations for GHG emissions. This unreliable accounting process and prediction of coal resources has been demonstrated to be inaccurate throughout the life of the Wilpinjong Coal Mine.

The fact that the proposal is to access a further 14 Mt of coal in the same time period as the existing approval is a demonstration of poor prediction of the coal resource. There is no information provided on the calculation that the exemption of Cumbo Creek realignment and Rocky Hill complex would prevent access to more than 7Mt of coal. This is purely conjecture and should not be used throughout the assessment process as an offset or justification to

¹⁷ Peabody 4 March 2025. CCC minutes

disturb a further 155 ha of land containing significant biodiversity, cultural heritage and water source values to the border of Wollar Village.

Statements on the Wilpinjong Mine website confirm the anomalies between the current WEP approval and the proposed mine expansion: *'The Stage 1 Modificationwill extend a current mining pit but will not change the intensity of mining or total production through to December 2033'*¹⁸ This demonstrates that the proposal is the first stage of a larger project and will continue mining over a period of time that the WEP had predicted a wind down of production.

4. Biodiversity Impacts

The assessment of impacts on critically endangered matters of national environmental significance resulting in significant and irreversible impacts is very poor. There is particular concern that the assessment of Derived Native Grasses, that are the dominant native vegetation on the proposed disturbance area, have not been adequately assessed. The blatant attempt to demonstrate that the quality of native grassland does not meet the Commonwealth definition of Box Gum Woodland CEEC is based on poor assessment methodology in an effort to avoid offset requirements under the EPBC Act.

The proposal to destroy significant habitat, including breeding sites, in a regional hotspot for endangered microbats will cause a significant and irreversible impact on these species. The cumulative impact of loss of biodiversity values on the valley floor between the Goulburn River National Park and Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve has not been assessed

More information on this matter is provided in Appendix B.

The Aquatic Ecological Report (Appendix G) appears to have ignored the record of the vulnerable Giant Barred Frog (*Mixophyes iteratus*) in the Wollar Creek catchment.¹⁹

5. Surface Water impacts

The assessment of water sources impacted by the Wilpinjong Coal Mine over time, including the predictions offered in the Surface Water Assessment (Appendix E), do not represent the true nature of the disturbance of surface water flows and destruction of water sources in the Greater Wollar Creek catchment.

The Association does not support the statement that *'The current water management system infrastructure and operating rules have been effective in managing the surface water impacts of the approved Wilpinjong Coal Mine.'*²⁰ If this were the case, there would be no need for Wilpinjong Coal to apply for an increase of the water discharge licence from 6.5 ML/day to 20 ML/day. This demonstrates that predictive modelling has not adequately captured the increasing

¹⁸ <https://wilpinjongmine.com.au/future-plans/>

¹⁹ NSW Department of Primary Industries, Water. 2016. Background document for amended plan. *Water Sharing Plan for the Hunter Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources 2009*

²⁰ WRM 8 August 2025. Surface Water Assessment Pit 8 Extension Modification p 121

regularity of extreme wet weather events and that the mine on-site storage capacity is inadequate. There appears to be no discussion of this issue in Appendix E.

We also note that it has been identified that '*The Modification has the potential to cause impacts beyond the impacts of the approved operation.*'²¹

A detailed analysis of the impacts on surface water and groundwater sources has been provided in Appendix C of this submission.

6. Renewable Energy expansion in Wollar District

The Association has been supportive of the NSW Government direction in establishing the first renewable energy zone (REZ) in NSW. Central West Orana REZ starts at Wollar with the Barigan Creek switching station connecting two new 500 kV transmission lines to the Bayswater to Mt Piper transmission line that passes through the district.

This is timely to coincide with the closure of both Bayswater Power Station as early as 2030 and the likelihood of Mt Piper going into reserve at a similar time. It is noted that the Wilpinjong Mine website states that the mine supplies 25% of the state's power.²² If the main purpose of this proposal is to continue supplying Bayswater up to closure then it is substantially different to the WEP that was assessed as a coal export project from 2026 to 2033.

The Wollar district also hosts the Wollar Solar Farm and the Goulburn River Solar Farm. There are a significant number of new employment opportunities with these developing projects. The region is not relying on mining to boost local employment. There is now a significant workforce shortage with foreign workers having to be recruited for renewable energy projects and mining competing with other industries for workers such as housing construction.

Various reports have demonstrated how mining skills are immediately transferable to other industries.²³ The regional economy does not need the Wilpinjong Coal Mine operations to be extended by six months to maintain local employment opportunities. It is noted that the continuation of full employment at Wilpinjong Mine will only extend for another two years to 2027 through the proposed Pit 8 extension.

Under the NSW Government Future Jobs and Investment Authority arrangements, immediate assistance could be provided to the Wilpinjong Mine workforce to commence transitioning into other employment opportunities that already exist in the local area.

It is a contradiction in NSW Government policy to continue approving thermal coal mine expansion while fostering renewable energy projects and aiming for the transition to Net Zero by 2050 through the *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023*.

This proposal will only impede the transition rather than encouraging the mining workforce to transfer skills or retrain to diversify into new and emerging industry opportunities.

²¹ Ibid

²² <https://wilpinjongmine.com.au/future-plans/>

²³ <https://mining-recruitment-jobs.com/the-transferable-skills-from-mining-to-renewable-energy/>

Conclusion

The Association recommends that the proposed Modification 3 – Pit 8 extension be rejected on the following grounds:

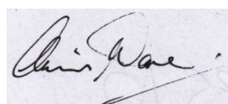
- Substantially different to current SSD 6764 approval
- First stage of a larger, more impactful expansion
- Mitigation measures inappropriate and lacking substance
- Inadequate Noise, Air Quality, Blasting and Water modelling
- Poor assessment of biodiversity and cultural heritage impacts
- Unassessed cumulative social impacts
- No public benefit
- Competition for regional jobs
- Increased contribution to climate change

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure must take into account the guiding principles of the *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023*. Section 8(2) provides that “*there is a critical need to act to address climate change, which is a serious threat to the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of New South Wales.*”

The recent Independent Planning Commission decision to reject the Restart of Redbank Power Station considered that even a small additional contribution to NSW emissions ‘*does not render the impact immaterial.*’²⁴

It is inappropriate for the NSW Government to support expansion of thermal coal production within a renewable energy zone. The result is a hindrance to the rapid transition away from fossil fuels needed to ensure intergenerational equity, a safe climate and ecologically sustainable development.

Yours sincerely



President

Attachments:

Appendix A – Review of Social Impact Assessment

Appendix B – Review of Biodiversity Assessment

Appendix C – Review of Water Impact Assessment

²⁴ IPC 2025 Restart of Redbank Power Station. Statement of Reasons cl 37