

WOLLAR PROGRESS ASSOCIATION

C/- 3483 Ringwood Rd

WOLLAR NSW 2850

wollarprogressassociation@gmail.com

Genevieve Lucas
Contact Planner
Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Locked Bag 5022,
Parramatta NSW 2124

Monday 17 November 2025

Submission of Objection MP08_0184-Mod-8

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 objects to the proposed expansion of the Ulan Coal Complex because it is not an environmentally sustainable development and will impact on Wollar community members.

The Ulan Mod 8 – Ulan West Continued Operations (the application) is not in the public interest and should be rejected because of the cumulative impacts of coal mining in the region on the environment, on the local community and on economic diversity.

Key Issues of Objection

The Association bases this objection on the following key issues:

1. The application should be assessed as a new project not as a modification
2. The cumulative impacts have not been adequately assessed
3. The application to continue extracting coal until 2041 is irresponsible under international law
4. The expansion threatens regional economic diversity

1. Assessment as a new project

The application is not substantially the same as the Ulan West Operations as approved in 2012 with six subsequent modifications that were much smaller in size and with the impact falling mostly within the mine lease boundary.

The application proposes to impact a further 1734 ha of land outside the current mining lease through subsidence and clearing for infrastructure and to construct a new 132 ha tailings storage on revegetated open cut pit disturbance adjacent to the Goulburn River.

The proposal to extend mining until 2041 to extract 43 million tonnes more coal and release an additional 105 MT of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions is substantially different from the current approval. An additional six years of mining will continue the discharge of contaminated mine water into the Goulburn River adding an approximate 30,000 tonnes or more to the salt load.

2. Cumulative Impacts

2.1 Social Impacts

The cumulative 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, community volunteers, 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 application will directly impact another 17 properties in the region. Past underground mining operations at Ulan Coal Complex have resulted in the acquisition of a large number of private properties causing additional loss of farming activity, community members and volunteers.

This property acquisition and depopulation of the district has had a particular impact on the capacity of the local Rural Fire Service. The Ulan and Wollar brigades have been disbanded through loss of volunteers and amalgamated into the larger Cumbo RFS with a large area of operation in a high risk fire zone. There have already been total fire ban days in the region and numerous fires started by lightening strikes in recent weeks.

The increase in more intense extreme weather events caused by climate change attributable to fossil fuel emissions is causing significant harm to lives and livelihoods now. By 2041, if GHG emissions are not curbed now, the whole region will be at greater risk, including the coal mines themselves.

The approved 31 daily coal train movements on the Sandy Hollow rail line from the three large mining operations in the region impacts Wollar community members. Trip planning from remote properties can be difficult for meeting appointments. The interruption of travel times at four level crossings in the district has a significant impact, including on access to remote areas for emergency service vehicles. Extending the period of rail use by Ulan coal trains for a further six years adds to this social impact.

Coal trains have approval to operate on total fire ban days. These very hot, windy days are predicted to increase in the future due to climate change driven extreme weather events. Coal trains have started bush fires in the Wollar district on past total fire ban days. This has added to

the stress and loss of work time by local RFS volunteers. By 2041 this problem could be catastrophic.

2.2 Environmental Impacts

2.2.1 Mine water discharge

Many remaining members of Wollar community are downstream water users in the Upper Goulburn River water source with basic water rights. The cumulative impact of mine water discharge from the three large mines, over time, has caused a change the ecological character of the river and increased the salt load impacting water quality. Ulan Coal Complex has the largest discharge licence of the three mines, releasing up to 30 ML/day into the Goulburn River.

The Goulburn River has lost its natural drying phase in dry conditions, generally occurring in the summer months, and now has continuous flows that can be, at times, consisting entirely of discharged mine water. The increased salt loads have been evident in stock and domestic water pumped from the river under basic rights.

The constant flows with high salt load has impacted riparian vegetation and changed the river ecology. Carp are now prevalent where before they were controlled by the natural drying phase.

The increased flow rates of over 50 ML/d through cumulative mine discharge has also added to loss of property access in minor flood conditions. The application assessment has not considered the cumulative impact with the proposed expansion of the Wilpinjong Coal Mine. The application by Peabody Energy to increase the licenced discharge from that mine to 20 ML/d will substantially add to the impacts of mine water discharge on the Goulburn River.

The application proposes to continue mine water discharge for an additional six years. This will add at least another 30,000 tonnes of salt to the Goulburn River increasing impacts on water users and the environment. This cumulative impact has not been assessed.

2.2.2 New tailings storage infrastructure

The application includes the construction of a new large tailings dam on 132 ha of the old back-filled and revegetated open cut pit adjacent to the diverted section of the Goulburn River. This is of great concern to downstream water users. There has been no monitoring of potential groundwater leakage from this site and no proposal to introduce groundwater monitoring between the new infrastructure and the river.

There is very little information provided about this aspect of change to the Ulan Coal Complex tailings management arrangements. The current tailings storage in the remnant East Pit void, along with brine from the reverse osmosis plant, has major issues with leakage into the river when the tailings/brine storage reaches 360 – 361 mAHD.

The community has had long term concerns about the river diversion, the open cut mining right to the edge of the diversion and the quality of the rehabilitation of the old open cut void through the original riverbed. The chemical composition of the backfill material now proposed to be disturbed again and stockpiled in an unspecified area of the mine site has not been assessed.

The continued storage of coal fines in an area adjacent to the Goulburn River with possible groundwater linkages through the old river bed and alluvial aquifer has not been adequately

assessed. There is concern that this proposal has a high risk of contaminated leakage into the river causing increased toxic pollution.

The application has not identified other options with a lower risk factor for the placement of increased tailings storage capacity on the mine site.

The cumulative impact of the Ulan Coal Complex operations on the integrity of the Goulburn River ecosystem has not been assessed.

2.3 Economic Impacts

The application does not assess the lost opportunity to transition to a more diversified economy. While the emphasis is on the continuation of mine employment and regional economic outputs, the unbalanced dependence of the regional economy on mining activity as a cumulative impact is not addressed.

The Mid-Western Regional Council (MWRC) 2025 economic profile¹ demonstrates that currently nearly 20% of the jobs in the region are mining jobs. This reveals a vulnerability risk in regard to economic diversity and the need to encourage a broader range of employment opportunities.

MWRC and Ulan Coal Complex are within the Central West Renewable Energy Zone (CWOREZ). There is a major shortage of workforce in the construction sector and mining is competing for labour across all industry sectors.

The application does not assess the opportunities to transition to new, cleaner industries. It will, in fact, delay these opportunities for mine workers to transfer their skills or retrain to be active participants in a more diverse regional economy.

The NSW Government is investing in the Future Jobs and Investment Authorities with the specific aim of managing a smooth transition away from fossil fuel production. The Central West Authority has a high priority. The application will hinder this process and extend the period of economic dependence and vulnerability to the uncertain global future of the coal industry.

3. International Court of Justice (ICJ)

The ICJ handed down an advisory opinion in July 2025 to the United Nations that determined the obligations of states in relation to climate change under international law generally.

The ICJ found unanimously that states must reduce their GHG emissions under international law and minimise any actions that would result in their release. It found that it is inconsistent with international obligations to continue supporting, licensing, and approving fossil fuel production.

GHG emissions arising from fossil fuels must be reduced, both in terms of fossil fuel production and consumption, irrespective of where the fuel is burned. Importantly, production of fossil fuel was found to be an “internationally wrongful act”.

¹ <https://www.midwestern.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/2/business/2025-economic-and-business-profile-update-final.pdf>

The Association considers that the application breaches this ICJ finding, particularly in regard to the production of an additional 43 million tonnes of coal producing over 105 MT of GHG up to 2041. This is an irresponsible expansion of fossil fuel production that could cause Australia and the NSW Government to be taken to the ICJ with orders to compensate states or individuals disproportionately harmed by the impacts of climate change.

Conclusion

The Association recommends that the proposed Modification 8 – Ulan West Continued Operations be rejected on the following grounds:

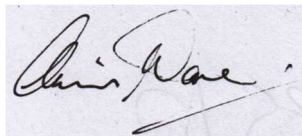
- Substantially different to current MP08_0184 approval
- Cumulative impacts on health of the Goulburn River
- Unassessed cumulative social impacts
- Competition for regional jobs
- Increased contribution to climate change

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.*’²

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 urgently required to ensure intergenerational equity, a safe climate and ecologically sustainable development.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Gae', is written over a light blue grid background.

President

² IPC 2025 Restart of Redbank Power Station. Statement of Reasons cl 37