

Dr Kerri Clarke
Environmental Representative
Maules Creek Community
Consultative Committee
Sustainable Living Armidale
PO Box 357
Uralla NSW 2358
12 October 2017

Ms C. McNally
Secretary of Planning NSW
Department of Planning and Environment
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Ms McNally

As the environmental representative on the Maules Creek Coal community consultative committee I am submitting a request from numerous members of the community to not approve the Whitehaven Sound Power Levels, Modification 4 of the Maules Creek coal mine approval to delete Condition 12(a).

The request by Whitehaven to modify the regulations to avoid future fines and potentially further exceed noise is untenable. CCC members have been told by Whitehaven Maules Creek Coal staff via email (dated 11 September 2017) that “Whitehaven Coal takes all matters of environmental compliance extremely seriously. We are proud of our strong record of noise compliance across all our sites”, and yet only recently Maules Creek Coal mine was moved to a High risk level 3 licence ranking. A move that does not come about due to a good compliance record.

While “Whitehaven Coal is not proposing to make more noise or operate in a louder manner” the track record of noise exceedances and apathy of mine impact to local community members is a clear indicator that Whitehaven will not be making any changes to decrease noise, but is protecting their own mining interests and revenue. Any modification opens the way for noise exceedances past any increases allowed for through the proposed modification. The comments: “The mandatory noise levels at properties surrounding the Maules Creek Coal Mine will not change. There will be no change for our neighbours.” concern me a great deal, as I have learnt to read between the lines over these past years of sitting on the Maules Creek Coal CCC and know that this means the local members will have to endure mine noise without any redress from the mine or regulatory bodies. The “Existing management and mitigation measures, as well as annual sound power level (SWL) testing, will continue to be undertaken at the Maules Creek Coal Mine.” that Whitehaven speaks of have been inadequate to date. With background noise levels for Maules Creek known to be under 20 decibels in the usual setting, there is no surprise that mine noise has severely impacted the community. Making further allowances for mine noise is unacceptable.

I personally witnessed noise from the coal loading train in the early hours of the morning during a Maules Creek visit. Despite being some distance from the mine along Black Mountain Rd, the loud metallic grinding sounds and vibrations was physically disturbing. A colleague visiting with me phoned the EPA and made a noise complaint that morning. This is just a single example and not the continual noise experience of local residents.

The wheedling away of regulations put in place to protect both small and wider community from coal mining impacts is frustrating to witness. The time demands for community members to prepare submissions, monitor and report mine noise, blast, dust, light and environmental pollution that would otherwise go unnoticed by authorities, all while living with the daily stress of having an unruly mine as their neighbour running 24 hours of the day are additional burdens. I had previously written an objection to the Whitehaven request to modify the requirement to bus workers to Maules Creek Coal mine, mainly from the Gunnedah area due to workers mostly driving, all of which was in breach of the regulation which was put in place to lessen impact on the community of extra road traffic. Unfortunately, my objection and those of the community were to no avail. The general public and politicians assume that mining companies follow specific guidelines and requirements to protect communities and environments, and that regulatory authorities are monitoring mining activity closely. My experience as a CCC member shows that neither of these assumptions are correct. I understand that your office and the EPA have limited staff that are stretched to capacity, but I believe that not allowing for any modification is a step in the right direction to support community and environment. Unfortunately, local fauna are completely neglected when it comes to impacts from mining noise (and from blasts, dust, contamination, and loss of habitat).

Regards

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'K Clarke', written in a cursive style.

Kerri Clarke

Environmental Representative Maules Creek CCC