

## **Submission by the Wilderness Society Newcastle**

### **Objection to the Cobbora Coal project**

The Wilderness Society Newcastle objects to the Cobbora Coal project, which will establish an open cut coal mine in central west NSW. The Wilderness Society Newcastle is opposed to the project due to its unacceptable impacts on threatened species habitat, its unnecessary production of polluting coal at a time when coal demand is falling and energy investments should be strongly prioritising renewable energy opportunities such as solar thermal. There are also a range of negative social, health and economic impacts of this project.

#### **Cobbora Coal project is an inappropriate investment of \$3.4 billion of NSW taxpayers' money.**

This investment of \$3.4 billion of NSW taxpayers' money is a misplaced use of funds. This is partly because the cost benefit analysis for the project has not taken into account and properly compared with long term costs of mining to the local community. Without a cost benefit analysis, it is not possible to assume that immediate financial benefits will outweigh long term negative social impact. The monies spent on this particular development would be better invested in infrastructures with known and immediate benefits to the community.

The approx \$3.4 billion project will run at a loss. It is a direct subsidy to power generators in NSW. The argument for continued coal-fired electricity in comparison to the long-term benefits of renewable energy sources has not been made. Taxpayer's money would be better invested in renewable energy sources.

The Wilderness Society Newcastle sees

- a) Social disruption: The NSW Government has purchased 68 of 90 properties in the affected area which may well lead to the erosion of the local community. Furthermore, the proposal is to mine 20mtpa (million tonnes per annum) to produce only 12mtpa of usable coal. This coal is an extremely poor quality product with high ash content. The health impacts of using poor quality coal have not been assessed, however poor health within the community as a consequence of mining low quality coal contributes to negative social consequences of the project. Towns and properties along the coal chain will be impacted by additional noise and dust from increased coal train movements.
- b) Competition for workforce with other industries: particularly the agricultural industry across western NSW; or the costs of major infrastructure upgrades, particularly rail lines, to accommodate additional coal transport. High water use by the mine is also likely to impact on surrounding industries.

#### **The project justification is based on outdated electricity demand and coal price projections.**

The justification for the project is based on incorrect projections of demand for coal-fired electricity over the next 10 years. Demand has dropped significantly since this project was proposed.

The price of black coal on the export market has also dropped below the projections used to justify the need to source cheaper coal for domestic use.

**The project will generate additional greenhouse gas emissions conflicting with State and Federal policy to reduce climate change impacts.**

The project aims to provide cheap domestic coal to power stations in the Upper Hunter and Central Coast.

**The project will destroy 1,867ha of significant woodland providing habitat for 39 threatened species, including nationally listed endangered species.**

The clearing of 1,867ha woodland habitat will impact on species listed for national protection: eg Grassy Box Woodland; endangered and vulnerable plants, including 100% loss of the local population of *Tylophora linearis*, endangered bird species including australasian bittern, malleefowl, regent honeyeater, superb parrot; and vulnerable microbat species - southern long-eared bat, large-eared pied bat.

Also a large number of threatened woodland birds protected under the NSW Threatened Species Act were recorded in the area of impact - brown treecreeper, diamond firetail, glossy black-cockatoo, grey-crowned babbler, hooded robin, speckled warbler, varied sittella, masked owl, barking owl, powerful owl.

The proposed biodiversity offset package has not been finalized and is inappropriately based on mine rehabilitation. The replacement of high conservation value habitat especially tree hollows in slow growing woodland species takes centuries.

**The project will destroy significant Aboriginal cultural heritage sites.**

The project has a very large footprint and will cause major environmental impacts on woodland habitat as well as groundwater and surface water sources and loss of at least 79 Aboriginal cultural heritage sites.

**The project will disturb approx 47km<sup>2</sup> of land which includes land of important high conservation value and important agricultural value.**

**The project will compete with the Mudgee wine and tourism industry for water supply during drought conditions.**

The mine will need to use up to 3,700 ML (million litres) of water per year from surface water and groundwater interception. The use of high security licenced water from the Cudgegong River will threaten the water security of the Mudgee region wine and tourism industries. It could also threaten the long-term security of urban water supply from Windamere Dam.

In summary, The Wilderness Society Newcastle objects to the Cobbora Coal project and calls on the Planning Department to recommend this project application is rejected.

Sincerely,

Naomi Hogan

Campaign Manager, The Wilderness Society Newcastle.