

3/24 Lord How Drive
ASHTONFIELD NSW 2323

06 March 2013

Major Planning Assessments
Department of Planning and Infrastructure
GPO Box 39
Sydney 2001

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: OBJECTION

Cobbora Coal Project – Preferred Project Report -Application No: 10-0001

I am a resident of the Hunter Valley and I welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposal to establish the Cobbora Coal project in central west NSW north-west of Mudgee and east of Dubbo.

As a state-owned coal mining project, projected to cost the taxpayers up to \$3.4 billion and tied to the sale of the power stations, it will lock NSW into coal-fired electricity generation until at least 2036. This is an untenable and economically irresponsible position given the following considerations:

- justification for the project is based on incorrect projections of demand for coal-fired electricity over the next 10 years, demand having 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;
- renewable energy investment opportunities will be destroyed, denying new capital investment and jobs into NSW. Over \$11 billion worth of investment in wind energy alone is ready to go, waiting for the green light from the O'Farrell government. The Clean Energy Finance Corporation set up by the Federal Government has \$5 billion set aside for investment in renewable energy projects; and,
- while costing NSW taxpayers between \$1.5 billion and \$3.4 billion, the mine will be running at a loss by providing 5.5 million tonnes of coal per annum (mtpa) for 17 years at a heavily subsidised price. This is a direct subsidy to NSW power generators. 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.

Isn't it now time for the O'Farrell government to drop their hostility to renewable energy and work with industry and community groups to increase the renewable energy capacity of NSW.? Increasing renewable energy capacity will render new coal mines, such as Cobbora, unnecessary and save the taxpayers of NSW billions of dollars.

With NSW already being the biggest emitter in Australia and having power stations that are amongst the most polluting and inefficient in the world, the proposed mine will also have significant negative impacts on the environment for the following reasons:

- confirmed advance of climate change with nine of the ten hottest years on record occurring since 2000 and the January 2013 heat wave being described by the Bureau of Meteorology as “unprecedented, in terms of its duration, its intensity and its extent”;
- the estimated annual contribution to the carbon footprint of NSW of coal burnt from Cobbora is **29 million tonnes**;
- water demand for mining operations is proposed to increase from 3,700 ML per year up to 4,340 ML per year. The use of groundwater and surface water associated with the Cudgegong River system will threaten the water security of the wine and tourism industries in the Mudgee region. It could also threaten the long-term security of urban water supply from Windamere Dam;
- at least 79 Aboriginal cultural heritage sites will be destroyed; and, 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; and,
- the clearing of 1,959ha woodland habitat is a significantly large footprint and impacts 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, and Superb Parrot; and vulnerable microbat species including the Southern Long-Eared Bat and the Large-Eared Pied Bat.

The Preferred Project Report has failed to identify:

- adequate financial gains or security of affordable electricity prices for the people of NSW;
- an appropriate or adequate offset package for habitat destruction because this is not achievable;
- justification for the increased water demand for mining operations from the previous prediction of 3,700 ML per year up to 4,340 ML per year;
- adequate assessment of the increased pump rate from the Cudgegong River and access to higher natural flows;
- the increased dust emissions by raising the height of over burden emplacements by 20m. The air quality model needs to be redone using all available meteorological information; and,
- the health and social impacts on local residents affected by increased air pollution from fine dust particles and noise from the proposed rail loop.

The environmental, social and economic costs of the Cobbora Coal Project are unacceptable and irresponsible, while continued reliance on coal fired electricity generation is based on out-dated and short-sighted thinking. In an environment where public sector jobs are being cut and funding for health, education and public transport is constantly under attack, it is economic suicide to invest billions in a project that will impose long term economic and environmental costs on NSW and fails to pass the cost-benefit test. With the worst impacts of climate change rapidly approaching, the time to transform NSW's energy sector is now.

Yours sincerely,

Aina M Ranke