

Submission on the Airly Mine Extension Project EIS

By Deborah Cooke, Capertee Valley resident

I live and work on approximately 150 acres in the Capertee Valley as well as working part time off farm in Mudgee. On my property I currently run and have run a variety of livestock including cattle, alpacas and pigs. I grow free range pigs and supply approximately 50 piglets per year to a free range operation in Ebenezer which supplies meat to Sydney restaurants. I plan to expand this enterprise due to the ever increasing demand for free range meat. The availability of a reliable and clean water supply is crucial to the running of my farming operation as it is for the multitude of agricultural enterprises which operate in the valley.

In conjunction with Mudgee Fine Foods I will commence Farm Tours on my property in March 2015. These tours will take as their focus free range farming as well as sustainable living with an emphasis on renewable energy systems, namely solar. As an educator and advocate for strong, healthy and resilient communities I am interested in offering urban residents the opportunity to experience firsthand where their food and fibre comes from. I would like to conduct these tours in an environment which boasts clean air, clean water and which is free from visual blight and industrial noise. It is also my desire to share with visitors the unique environment which is the Capertee Valley.

The Capertee Valley lends itself perfectly as a tourist destination due to its unique and majestic natural environment, its abundant wildlife and its proximity to Sydney. Due to the dedication and passion of a number of local residents the Capertee Valley is increasingly becoming a popular tourist destination both for domestic and international visitors. Needless to say the continued development of tourism in the area relies on preserving its natural assets. It is my view that an expansion of coal mining will impact negatively on this expanding industry as well as on the long standing and newly emerging agricultural enterprises in the Capertee Valley.

As a farmer, future tourist operator, environmentalist and resident of the Capertee Valley I object to the Airly Mine Extension Project on the basis that the proposal:

- Is likely to be economically marginal when taking into account the lower than forecast decline in demand for domestic coal, the placement in care and maintenance of nearby Wallerawang Power Station, the current price of coal which is at a six year low and China's announcement of a reintroduction of a tariff on coal imports. Surely a Cost Benefit Analysis would reveal that the 'benefits' of a short term and financially marginal mining operation would not outweigh the negative impacts on water, air, ecology and the flow on effect these will have on agriculture and tourism? While I understand that coal fired energy is an important part of the mix as we transition to a low carbon economy I do not believe that the expansion of existing coal mines is justifiable. Investment in the development of renewable energy systems is surely the wise and responsible path. Removal of the Government subsidies to the fossil fuel industry and a factoring in of the uncounted externality costs of fossil fuels (social, environmental and health) are needed to place renewables on an even playing field.
- Has the potential to seriously damage the State Conservation Area, which due to its internationally recognised geological features is proposed for addition to the World Heritage Area when mining ceases. The cliff collapses at Baal Bone Colliery is tangible evidence of the devastating impact of mining in this landscape.
- Has the potential to critically compromise the continued availability of clean, safe groundwater for agricultural enterprises.
- May result in downstream impacts of mine effluent including leakage from waste dumps in the adjacent Wollemi World Heritage Area.

Requests:

I am wholeheartedly unconvinced of the merits of Centennial Coal's proposal and I object to it but if more coal is to be mined from this fragile, unique and ecologically sensitive area I request that:

- Centennial Coal upholds its commitment to extract only half of the coal under the whole of the State Conservation Area to protect biodiversity and to avoid pagoda and cliff collapses
- The Grotto is fully protected
- The Airly Mine ruins are fully protected
- Independent monitoring of water usage from surface and groundwater sources as well as its return to the environment

It is my sincere hope that common sense, wisdom and a love of this irreplaceably unique Australian landscape will prevail in the decision making process pertaining to this proposal.

Yours Faithfully

Deborah Cooke