

SUBMISSION

WARKWORTH CONTINUATION PROJECT – 2014

This is the same application by Rio Tinto which, together with Mount Thorley Continuation Project proposes to mine the same area which was rejected by the Land and Environment Court and the Supreme Court and shows the mine and the Government have treated our Law Courts with contempt as they have our small but vibrant Community of Bulga. It must be rejected.

The huge discrepancies in the EIS which was so hastily prepared is the second reason why this project must be rejected. The Secretary's Requirements were issued on 22 May, 2014 and the 14 Volume EIS was available by 13 June, 2014. It was not possible for the requirements to be addressed in that time and it is quite clear they have not been properly addressed.

The State Government's determination to see this profiteering foreign-owned company achieve its goal is seen to be tainted with corruption. Only 2% of the NSW Government's revenue comes from royalties. Regional Development Australia – Hunter in its economic modelling found a smaller coal industry would have only a minor impact on the Hunter's economy but would improve air quality, health and environmental impacts and bring benefits to other industries such as tourism. Fewer coal mines in the valley would draw more visitors to this extremely popular tourist destination which is also home to a range of agricultural pursuits, service industries and manufacturing.

The widespread community and NSW decision makers should not be influenced by the coal industry's spin.

A survey by the Australian Institute – June 2014 found only 37% of Hunter residents considered the benefits of mining outweigh the costs. 83% do not want the industry to expand and 41% want it to decrease or be phased out. Despite this the mining industry advocates insist on portraying the industry as vital to the state and regional economy.

The Hunter's coal industry lobby is a powerful player in NSW and has the financial ability and political support to impart its message to the wider community, unlike smaller more environmentally responsible groups.

Only 5% of Hunter Valley jobs are in coal mining. Only 25% of employees at Mount Thorley Warkworth mine live in the Singleton LGA (The EIS states 30%) and only a minute number of those are from the Bulga Milbrodale district. 32% of employees at the mine live in Maitland (The EIS states 17%). These figures in the EIS are incorrect.

Excessive strip ratio through Saddle Ridge would make this project economically unviable for the foreseeable future. Other mines are closing through unprofitability. With the price of coal at an all-time low it is questionable whether this mine is economically viable.

The Warkworth Sands Woodlands is a unique ecological community of ancient windblown sand deposits which is home to at least 4 groups of threatened species. Only 460ha representing 13% of the original WSW remains. To allow another 107ha of this woodland to be cleared by Warkworth mine contradicts the ideals of the governments threatened species legislation. Once again the government is willing to "change the rules" to suit a large foreign-owned mining company - Rio Tinto. The same has been done with the "like for like" ruling, with land at Putty and Merriwa being accepted as offset areas.

The EIS states 23% of privately owned houses in Bulga are unoccupied which equates to 37 houses. This also is incorrect. Of the 156 houses in the Bulga Milbrodale district 3 are unoccupied - these are in need of repairs. The fact is there are no houses currently available for rent in the district. There is one house for sale but it is very hard to sell a house in Bulga with Rio Tinto applying for an extension which will come within 2.6kms of the village. Property values have decreased by 11% according to the Valuer General's figures.

EMM conducted interviews with local residents regarding the social impacts. No record of this appears in the EIS.

The World Health Organisation guidelines state there are no safe levels of PM2.5's or PM10's but the Planning Department has set an arbitrary number based on per cubic metres produced per day. Who are the health experts? The WHO or the Planning Department, once again working in the interests of the mining industry. We live within 5kms of this mine and we see and feel the dust.

No reliable noise measurements are taken by the mine. Monitors are strategically placed in positions of least noise. Many residents have noise monitors calibrated by the Planning Department Compliance Officers but mysteriously MTW monitors always measure less than the residents'. The EIS states there are very few issues of non-compliance.

Numerous residents make regular complaints but one would wonder whether these are recorded. We also suffer from the cumulative effects from Wambo, Warkworth, Mount Thorley and Bulga Coal's Glencore mines. We are at saturation point. We must not be expected to endure more noise, dust and blasting. To state this mine will not produce more noise when it is within 2.6kms of the village and with the loss of Saddle Ridge which was originally set aside by Rio Tinto to protect the Bulga Community, is to say the least an impossibility.

The statement in the EIS that mining Saddle ridge would have only minimal visual impact on the village is clearly incorrect. The visual amenity from our home is depressing and to drive to Singleton, where we must travel to shop is even more so – driving between Rio Tinto's Warkworth and Mount Thorley mines. The view from our residence where my husband was born 70 years ago was once a 120 degree panorama of gentle rolling hills. The view is now an ugly barren, flat topped wasteland. After 30 years of mining the emergence of rehabilitation was short-lived as that view has now been obliterated by renewed overburden dumping which we are told by compliance officers will be visible for the life of the mine.

Blasting does not seem to be worth mentioning according to Rio Tinto but we see the dust clouds (also the orange clouds such as on 27 June, 2014 at 1pm) and the effects of blasting are clearly visible in our home. Our home is not built on reactive soil as Rio Tinto consultants tried to tell us. It is built on sandy loam with mine subsidence standard foundations.

Aboriginal and non-aboriginal heritage is being destroyed by this callous mining company. Aboriginal artefacts and sacred sites have been destroyed and this project will destroy the World War II RAAF Base. A local Wonaruah man stated the lack of mullet in Cockfighters Creek is a sign it is polluted as mullet are a very sensitive fish. Discolouration of the water, in my opinion is another sign.

Wallaby Scrub Road was surveyed by Sir Thomas Mitchell in the 1820's and is part of the Great North Road. To offer a \$200,000 donation to the Convict Trail Project group gives the impression of bribery. This road is in very good condition and is used by many people travelling north as far as Queensland. It is also used by numerous coal miners travelling to work further up the valley. Do Rio Tinto not even care for their own fellow industry workers? Bulga Rural Fire Service Community First Responders use Wallaby Scrub Road in times of accidents and emergencies. This road must not be closed. If it is not closed the extension cannot go ahead. This alone should be enough reason for the project to be rejected.

Professor Glen Albrecht provided evidence in the Land and Environment Court of solastalgia – loss of place. We know this is true – we feel it. The constant pressure of coping with noise, dust, blasting and the disgustingly depressing visual amenity and knowing our home is being devalued more everyday has taken its toll on our health and finances. What should have been a peaceful retirement has turned into a nightmare. A constant fight to preserve our Community and its lifestyle.

We have no faith in Rio Tinto after being constantly subjected to their lies. Likewise we have no faith in the NSW Government or the Planning Department. To change the SEPP while awaiting the outcome of the Supreme Court decision and making the economics the key consideration in assessing projects displays the favouritism of the government towards the foreign mining giants. Minister Hazzard was induced by Rio Tinto into amending the "Deed of Agreement" so it now has no effect. Changing the ruling on offsets and failing to enforce consent conditions are two other factors which imply that these changes were made to facilitate ease of approval for Rio Tinto.

The Planning Assessment Commission must reject this project.

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