

This is a submission against the proposed expansion of the Warkworth coal mine (**Warkworth Continuation 2014**).

I object to the project, and I submit that it should be refused on the following grounds.

### **BROKEN PROMISES**

The proponent, Rio Tinto, signed a Deed of Agreement in 2003 promising not to mine Saddle Ridge, which protects the town of Bulga from the worst impacts of the Warkworth mine. Rio committed to approach Singleton Council and have Saddle Ridge and the endangered woodland around it rezoned for environmental protection.

The community needs to be able to trust both government and the corporate sector. Clearly commercial interests are driving decision making, ahead of community and personal health. The company is breaking both of the above promises, and cannot be trusted to keep any commitments it makes in the present application. The NSW Land and Environment Court has previously rejected Rio's application to mine Saddle Ridge. That decision must be respected. Instead the EDO is being knee-capped, and the government is hell bent on changing the planning laws to favour the mining industry, an industry that is largely foreign-owned.

### **DECEITFUL BEHAVIOUR**

Local residents learned of the new application the day before it was lodged. Residents attended a community consultation meeting with Rio Tinto just three weeks before that. At that point in time, the Environmental Assessment for the project would have been ready to lodge, but yet residents were not told about it. This is deliberately deceitful and sneaky behaviour from Rio Tinto, who clearly have no commitment to genuine consultation with the Bulga community. Elsewhere, community attendees at such consultation meetings find them to be a sham, just a case of ticking the box for the various mining companies.

### **UNFAIR PROCEDURE**

This application was lodged just two business days after new mining regulations came into force, which require the economic significance of a coal resource to be the primary factor influencing the government's determination of a mine application (the "Resource Significance" SEPP). This was surely not a co-incidence, and erodes the already fragile public trust in the objectivity of government in this process.

Ordinarily, a significant mine expansion such as this would go on public exhibition for up to 6 weeks. Yet this project was sprung on the public without any notice, with just two weeks for public submissions. A formal appeal by local residents for an extension to the public exhibition period was rejected by the Planning Department, with no reason given. There is a pattern developing whereby mining companies take as much time as they wish to prepare their proposals, yet the community, with comparatively insignificant resources (apart from passion and the moral right) are given little time to respond. Furthermore, such submission periods seem to be timed over holiday periods, and this happens far too often to believe that it is accidental. But then, that seems to be how our political process works, with contentious announcements buried at dead times.

For the government to accept this application from Rio Tinto in the first place shows a blatant disregard for the outcome of the previous Land and Environment Court ruling, and the current proceedings in the Supreme Court. It is difficult not to see the Modification application as the first step in a strategy to have the disallowed Warkworth Extension approved bit-by-bit to avoid full assessment. This again seems to be the *modus operandi*; repeated applications designed to exhaust the funds and energy of the community, wearing down all opposition. Alternatively, a small impact submission is made, followed by requests for alterations, seemingly as soon as the ink has dried on the first approval. Death by a thousand cuts.

The government appears to be conspiring with Rio Tinto to push this project through the approval system without due process. In light of recent revelations from the ICAC inquiry into mining lease corruption in NSW, this is not a good look.

## **IMPACTS ON RESIDENTS**

### Noise

The proposed expansion would bring the mine closer to Bulga, and remove some of the landform which currently shields the town from the worst of the mine's impacts. Noise from the mine already has a major impact on the mental and physical health of the residents of Bulga, as has and is happening across the Hunter and other coal mine fields. The mine has been in continual breach of the NSW Industrial Noise Policy, and its current approval conditions. Despite this, and despite 800 noise complaints against the mine from local residents last year alone, the NSW Government has not taken any action to enforce the mine's approval conditions. So, again, the community has no trust in the state government, only disgust.

How can the Government approve a project that would increase noise impacts on local residents, when the mine cannot even adhere to its existing approval conditions to control noise impacts?

### Particulate Emissions

The World Health Organization now classifies particulate pollution as a Class 1 Carcinogen. According to the EPA, 87% of PM10 sized particle pollution in the Upper Hunter comes from coal mines. It is likely that the existing Warkworth coal mine has a significant impact on the health of local residents, and the proposed expansion would cause an unacceptable increase in these impacts. A cumulative health impacts study of the Hunter coal industry is needed. Yet, cynically, the government is absolutely intent on elevating commercial considerations ahead of community health. Clearly the infamous and asinine quotation of Maurice lemma, viz "What is the point of saving the planet if we ruin the economy doing so?" still infests the mindset of government.

## **BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS**

The proposed Warkworth modification project would destroy 16 hectares of Endangered Ecological Communities. The promised "offset" for this irreversible loss of endangered species and their habitat does not compensate for its loss, and would not protect equivalent habitat to that proposed to be bulldozed. In any event, Rio Tinto have shown that their so-called 'offsets' are not protected anyway, and may be subject to future mining applications. In fact, the whole concept of offsets, and their application, is under widespread condemnation from conservationists across the state.

The Warkworth mine must not be allowed to expand into an area that Rio Tinto agreed, in 2003, to protect in a permanent conservation area, and in which open cut mining was rejected by the Land and Environment Court in earlier this year. To allow this expansion proposal is to destroy the integrity of the process.

### **SOCIAL IMPACTS**

Sadly, too many Hunter Valley villages have already been swallowed up by coal mining. Bulga, a close-knit community with deep historical significance for the Hunter, must be protected.

It is disappointing to note that Rio Tinto has been misleading its employees about the reasons the Warkworth Extension was rejected in court, and has failed to publicly acknowledge the agreement it has broken - to protect this area from mining. This has led to conflict in the community. In a further deeply disturbing revelation, local media reports that employees have revealed that they have been effectively forced into making submissions in favour of the mine expansion, with the implied threats to job security for non-compliance with this coercion. How can this have in a civilized democracy?

### **ABORIGINAL HERITAGE**

The proposed modification project would destroy four known Aboriginal artefacts that Rio Tinto has previously agreed to protect (under the Deed of Agreement). This agreement must be kept, and these important cultural artefacts of the Wonnaruah people must be protected.

### **JOBS AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS**

Rio Tinto have provided no economic assessment in support of the project, and their bland public statements to the effect that this project is needed to maintain jobs have not been supported by any information provided. Regardless, renewable energy has already become a larger employer than the capital intensive mining industry.

Rio Tinto's estimates of the employment and economic benefits of expanding the Warkworth mine have previously been rejected by the NSW Land and Environment Court, and they remain untrustworthy. Threats of jobs losses by the proponent should not be a factor for consideration when assessing the merits of this project, and they certainly should not take precedence over the protection of public health, adherence to the Deed of Agreement to protect Saddle Ridge from coal mining, and the right for the community of Bulga to persist.

### **GLOBAL WARMING**

No examination of any coal mine proposal can be considered in isolation from the massive threat posed to our planet's environment by the greenhouse gas emissions from coal exploitation. These threats are so serious that scientific findings are increasingly exposing global warming as an existential threat to most of humanity. Given the enormous developments in renewable energy all around the world, with Australia becoming an anti-science pariah by contrast, any move to proceed with business as usual, or expanded fossil fuel exploitation, is beyond stupid.