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Claudia Caton
2 Wilga Place
O'Connor ACT 2602
Ph: 0417 285 960
Email: tanami66@icloud.com

Mining and Industry Projects,
NSW Department of Planning & Infrastructure
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

I submit that the Warkworth (SSD 6464) and Mount Thorley (SSD 6465) Operations not be granted Continuation for the following reasons:

1. The Mount Thorley Warkworth (MTW) does not provide a long term future for the mine, when, in Rio Tinto's own literature, it would only extend another 21 years. Meanwhile, the water and landscape is permanently altered. Coal mining adversely lowers the surrounding water tables from the overburden (the earth removed to expose the coal), coal extraction and subsequent subsidence. The aquifers can be contaminated by benzene and other naturally occurring toxins that remain stable if left undisturbed beneath the earth's surface. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) submitted by Rio Tinto Australia does not map groundwater system springs and fault lines. It is there that subsidence can induce fracturing and affect leakage rates to productive aquifers and thus surrounding communities. It can also reduce surface water flows and quality with the same result. The overburden has the potential to produce acidity and salinity in surrounding water systems.
2. Water useage - Coal mining uses vast quantities of water to wash the coal (separating it from other minerals or rock present), for drilling, dust suppression and mining communities. On average, each tonne of coal requires 200 litres of water. A mine producing 5 million tonnes per annum will use a gigalitre (1,000,000,000) of water. That amount of water use will cripple the area, it's environment and those who live there, thus it is not just the coal mine acreage which is negatively impacted. Coal mining water is sourced from borefields, rivers and dams in direct competition with a sustainable but vulnerable agriculture sector and the towns and communities around it.
3. The transport of coal and resultant exposure of coal dust along the routes that it travels has impacts on many communities. The World Health Organisation (WHO) concluded that coal dust contributes to a range of diseases and health problems including respiratory illness, cardiovascular diseases and lung cancer. Particles penetrate the lungs and are difficult for the body to expel. Over time they accumulate and do more damage. Asthma and bronchitis can be first order symptoms. WHO states that there is no safe level of exposure to coal dust. A study in the Hunter Valley found that coal dust exposure increased by up to 13X as a train passed.
4. The economic benefits are negligible as they are only temporary and Rio Tinto's corporate structure ensures paying least tax, whereas farming or tourism are on-going and the benefits are directly felt by those communities. Significant royalties have not been felt by communities heavily impacted by mining. This MTW continuation application comes at a time when the ability of the earth's atmosphere to absorb gases emitted from fossil fuels has reached its limit. The effects have been rising seas and damage from more extreme weather including more frequent occurances of extreme heat. Combined with the impact on health, income, social well-being, these have measurable impacts on national assets and ongoing economic activity.

Water is an economic asset as well as an environmental/human necessity. Each state owns and operates bulk water. Legislation exists that makes it the responsibility of the states to deliver safe water and provide supply reliability. I suggest that water safety and reliability could be threatened if these changes are passed. With the majority of Rio Tinto's mining profits going overseas, the royalties would not cover such an enormous and long term effect on water and the cost to ameliorate this will have to be picked up by the state of New South Wales and that means the tax payer.

“Water scarcity is a major national challenge and there will be other challenges we must confront in the years to come. However, with the resilience, adaptability and boldness Australians have shown in the past, they can be overcome.” - The Hon John Howard MP, Prime Minister, 25 January 2007 from *A National Plan for Water Security*.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,

Claudia Caton

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