

## Interview Transcript

27/03/2014, 12:00-15:00

Bulga Hall, Bulga

(Attendees – see the back of transcript)

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### Question:

***Having heard the project description, what impacts do you think will occur as a result of the project?***

*(Increase in dust)*

One Bulga resident said they were impacted now by dust. He and questioned how C&A intend to address their existing dust concerns given the proposal will make dust worse than now. This comment was agreed by the group. Attendees agreed the severity of impact will be high.

*(Increase in noise)*

A resident said there would be more noise. The elevated ridgeway of Bulga amplifies existing operational noise. This comment was agreed by the group.

Saddleback Ridge (we call it Saddle Ridge) provides a noise buffer. There will be more noise and increase in amplification as the project moves closer to their residence and C&A remove Saddleback Ridge. The group also noted that the Department of Planning and Infrastructure had refused to consider noise amplification by the amphitheatre effect of the surrounding mountains. This comment was agreed by the group.

Another resident said there will be an increasing frequency of noise related issues and complaints. The resident believed that C&A cannot even meet their current commitments. This comment was agreed by the group.

According to the 2003 deed, Saddleback Ridge was never meant to be removed. However, this has now been nullified by the Minister of Planning and Infrastructure (2013). This comment was agreed by the group. Attendees agreed the severity of impact will be high.

*(Increase in vibration/blasting)*

One resident said C&A has not been transparent regarding blast schedules. This has been compounded by Singleton Council's lack of interest in verifying and updating the schedule of local road closures due to blasting. Another resident stated blasting has occurred within the specified 500 m safety distance. There is concern about C&A's capacity to provide blasting information in the future which the community requires (eg there have been issues with blasting on Charlton Road when C&A has not provided a date/time). This comment was agreed by the group. Attendees agreed the severity of impact will be high.

*(Decreasing property values)*

One Bulga resident said property values will decrease substantially.

*“No one wants to buy our properties now, so who will want to buy it in 5 years time?”*

One resident, who had their house assessed in 2009, stated the value of their property had significantly dropped since then. These comments were agreed by the group. C&A has deliberately waited for property values to drop over the years before making offers as part of their zone of acquisitions catchment. Attendees agreed the severity of impact will be high.

*(Increase in community division over land acquisitions)*

One resident questioned why C&A would buy some houses but not others. This is creating a real split in the Bulga community. Some residents want to leave but cannot because they are not within the zone of acquisition while others are in the zone but they want to stay.

The resident gave an example: His neighbour's house is 80 m in front of his (and in the land acquisition zone). However, the impact is just as bad as their house. Yet they have had no opportunity for compensation. The resident believed C&A is promoting division in the community for their own benefit.

One Bulga resident said their family had already been split up by previous land acquisitions (her sister had to relocate) and they did not want to suffer again with other family members being spilt up. They said C&A has a perspective that they do not need to 'fix things up' (eg operational improvements), instead, they just buy people out.

Attendees agreed the severity of impact will be high.

*(Increase in visual/lighting)*

One resident said lighting from the mine dumps shining into their house has progressively worsened. They had concerns that this will continue to worsen with the proposed expansion.

One Bulga resident said if the proposed bridge over Putty Road goes ahead there will be noise/lighting issues all through the night.

Attendees agreed the severity of impact will be high.

*(Ineffective grievance mechanism)*

The resident believed that C&A do not even pay attention to resident complaints anymore as they cannot even meet their current commitments. You call up to make a complaint and sometimes they do not respond. This comment was agreed by the group.

One Bulga resident said C&A of an attitude of entitlement. They said Rio is known around the world for having an arrogant culture. The resident also believed C&A have the power to do it (push the project despite legal rulings against it), that's the frustrating part.

Attendees agreed the severity of impact will be high.

*(Lack of trust in C&A)*

A Bulga resident said, in 2003 there was an indication that further expansion of the MTW mine would stop. Bulga residents were guaranteed that C&A could not go past Saddleback Ridge. C&A is now breaching what they previously committed to. Bulga residents believed they had the law on their side but now view the NSW government is as much at fault as C&A.

C&A are answering to no one (eg ignorance (ARROGANCE) of going with two new applications despite court hearings).

This comment was agreed by the group. Attendees agreed the severity of impact will be high.

*(Mental/Physical health)*

One Bulga resident said they have not been able to live a normal life for the last four years; life has been on hold since 2010.

*“What’s the point of building a shed when we don’t know what is going to happen? Why put money into it when it’s going to get the shit blasted out of it.”*

One Bulga resident said it is at the expense of the people of Bulga who want to be here and want to stay here. **I think the strong point was; The ‘core’ of the community don’t want to be ‘bought out’ or to move they want to STAY!**

*(Biodiversity)*

One Bulga resident said C&A is not providing anything new, the offset is already there and is not local. Residents believe the project is demonstrating an ongoing land grab by C&A with no intention to rehabilitate rather C&A is “de-habilitating”. **The offset is not ‘like-for-like’**

Attendees agreed the severity of impact will be high.

**Question:**

***Can the impacts be managed/ mitigated?***

No.

One Bulga resident said C&A has a demonstrated history of not fixing their operational impacts. This comment was agreed by the group.

One Bulga resident said C&A use operational measurements/thresholds as a means to validate a lack of action in responding to community complaints. C&A’s common response to complaints is that they comply. **Regardless of the fact that their methods of data collection do not comply with their “Conditions of Operation”**

One Bulga resident said the Hunter Valley is at saturation point. They emphasised it isn’t just dust but the particulates from diesel (mines in the area are going deeper and there a bigger operations).

Bulga will not survive as a community. Bulga used to be the gateway to the Hunter. It will end up like the ghost towns of Camberwell and Ulan with no community facilities, schools and shops to bring people together. It is now experiencing ‘solastagia’ as mentioned in the Land and Environment Court

which was what these other communities experienced - a deterioration of a quality of life and sense of place. Bulga Hall is more than just a physical building it is an important stakeholder that recently celebrated 100 years. The Hall's executive committee should be consulted.

**Question:**

***What opportunities do you think will occur as a result of the project?***

One Bulga resident said there will be very little benefits besides employment. However, C&A shows no loyalty to workers. If times are tough they will sack people immediately.

There will be no benefits to the Bulga community and if there was to be any sort of benefit it would need to be for the locals as well not just people living in the region.

One Bulga resident said contributions to Bulga are embarrassing (the only contribution is the tennis nets). Before mines were consolidated there was no money at all.

One Bulga resident said there was very little chance of local people in Bulga gaining employment with C&A. His son and a friend's son-in-law could not get a job with C&A. They commented it is difficult to find young people in this area that are benefiting from employment in the mines. If they are associated with Bulga they would not get a look-in.

Every mine uses employment as a means to apply pressure. Yet, these mines show no loyalty to workers. Workers at C&A are either in unions or not. Those not associated with unions get additional training and company benefits. Those with unions do not get any of these benefits. There is a real split within the local C&A workforce.

One Bulga resident said the 'community group' had a perspective that they could not ask for money when they were intending to fight C&A in court.

**Question:**

***What do you think would be the impacts if the project did not go ahead?***

"There will be loss of employment but these jobs were meant to finish back in 2003. It needs to finish one day."

**Question:**

***Do you think the benefits of the project outweigh the costs?***

"No. Project benefits do not outweigh impacts/costs. Name one benefit for the Bulga community?"

One Bulga resident said Wallaby Scrub Road should not be impacted as it is owned by the people and that it was wrong to let the NSW Government and C&A have the power to shut it down.

**Question:**

***How would you describe your relationship with the company?***

C&A has a poor grievance/complaints mechanism. There's never any response. They're never honest or upfront. Many residents stated that some people in C&A provide arrogant responses.

One Bulga resident said there is a perception of disbelief at what C&A are doing (considering the Land and Environment Court ruling).

**Question:**

***What are the existing operational impacts from MTW?***

*(Handling noise complaints)*

One Bulga resident said when it is noisy, C&A get perhaps 10 to 20 complaints and you cannot talk directly to anyone. You cannot tell the hotline where you live, etc. C&A only have one person trying to address all the complaints which is not feasible. The resident said it is ludicrous C&A cannot operate like this when a neighbouring mine on their doorstep (Bulga Coal Mine) is operating much more responsibly.

*"We are tired of dealing with the same responses, none are worth the cost of a phone call as C&A don't do anything."*

Noise attenuation commitments in 2003, still talking about it now (these were commitments provided by the current mine and former operator).

*(Lack of action from C&A)*

One Bulga resident stated if readings are 3-4 dBA over, C&A will stop some equipment and eventually they will shut more down if they cannot sort out the noise source.

C&A would shut down a piece of noisy equipment then move to next rather than stopping all equipment to start with and starting back up. This process can take 2 hours and it is up to the person complaining to make C&A call you back with updates.

*(Noise monitoring)*

One Bulga resident said C&A do not follow the monitoring guidelines in their consent (which require measurements 10 m in front of a dwelling). **And require measurement of dB<sub>C</sub> in the presence of Low Frequency Noise (most mine noise is LFN)**

One Bulga resident said people getting readings above 35-50 dBA. **And 60 dB<sub>C</sub>**

One Bulga resident said C&A are completing these EIS assessments when it is not noisy. C&A bring noise consultants to assess the degree of noise/disturbance and during this time you have the quietest two weeks. C&A are deliberately deceiving the community. **We have suggested these measurements should be random and dates/times unknown to the mine or community**

Attended monitoring is completed with C&A being aware of it so it does not accurately reflect the operation.

Real time monitors should be incorporated into monitoring, so people should not need to call up.

*(Noise - amphitheatre effect)*

One Bulga resident said C&A has refused to recognise the amphitheatre effect.

Noise amplified by end of valley (amphitheatre effect) - they refused to measure it.

C&A does not recognise the amphitheatre effect (Scott Brooks, DP&I complaints officer) has been there but there has been no follow up action by the department.

*(Noise – low frequency)*

One Bulga resident said that low frequency noise is not being measured.

One Bulga resident said low frequency noise (dBC) is not stopped by brick walls, double glazing, etc it travels further. For dBC to be correct, one needs to take the dBA reading and add 5db.

DP&I refuse to measure dBC.

*(Blasting)*

One Bulga resident said they are being affected by ground vibration. They live with a shaking house.

One Bulga resident said that geological faults are not taken into consideration in measuring blasts, yet they have had independent audits/inspections and been told that there are reactive clays in their area.

C&A had proposed to purchase 24 houses but C&A ignored the houses affected by the noise from the effects of elevation and geology.

One Bulga resident said the road management is poor eg 60km/hr for 1.5 hrs. The signage has been approved by Council and says 'road works' ahead. The view is that it's there to protect the workers rather than the residents.

*(Dust)*

One Bulga resident said that there is a daily build up of material at the bottom of their pool. They had it analysed and were informed 'its slime' black crystalline particles similar to coal. They have taken photos of this (the resident). They actually said "a black crystalline substance resembling' coal"

C&A was informed of this and said it is someone else's dust or a result of agriculture.

One Bulga resident said that when the north-east wind comes in they cannot open a window.

*(Emotional impact)*

One Bulga resident said they are living with the project because they do not want to dislocate/relocate their life. He referred to 'solastalgia' when speaking of Bulga.

One Bulga resident said people are facing a dilemma of choices that they will be forced out or they won't be able to stand living in Bulga.

*(Demographic concern)*

One Bulga resident said C&A's approach is not sufficient and questioned the validity of the process as C&A is not concerned at addressing issues at a community centric level.

One Bulga resident said the impact is on Bulga, not Singleton. There would be a more positive view of the project in Singleton because they reside much further away from the mine and as it is a larger community it provides a false positive on the support for the project.

*(Bullying)*

One Bulga resident said people across the brook who are leasing land as part of their agreement have policies which state they cannot lodge any complaints about C&A. It was also identified that people who had been bought out had contracts stating they could not lodge complaints about C&A in the future.

One Bulga resident said there is no willingness from C&A to engage locals at their level.

*(Lack of honesty from C&A)*

One Bulga resident asked what is going to happen to facilities of Bulga that are slated for acquisition. What about the church, cemetery?

They cited damage to the church and that C&A refused to pay any compensation to help repair it.

*(Inter-generational equity)*

One Bulga resident said we have to make our decision, he was eighth generations in the Bulga area. "Who will be the future custodians of the area? What are the kids going to have? The idea is to hand over something in better condition for future generations and their kids. We are handing over an area that will be worse not better".

*(Current suffrage)*

One Bulga resident identified a neighbour who was suffering from a worsening medical condition and whom urgently needed to sell their property (to move closer to medical care). However, due to the recent expansion of C&A's mine operations the home owner was not able to sell his house (on the market for over 6 months). The Bulga residents were upset that C&A was not willing to seek a better outcome for a local resident dealing with serious medical conditions. **He has since died!**

*(Engagement/community hotline)*

One Bulga resident said C&A is not responsive at the time an event is reported (eg 1am). You get an answering machine and a call from C&A in the morning.

The call centre is in Muswellbrook and the Bulga community have to push to get any action. **I don't recall that we believe it may be somewhere in Qld but they don't recognise where "Mt Thorley Warkworth" is not even which post code**

*(Lighting)*

One Bulga resident said lighting from C&A dumps shine through to their property. They see the whole operation from their place on top of the hill.

*(Water/tank system)*

One Bulga resident said they cannot drink the water out of their tank systems.

*(Road closures)*

One Bulga resident said the standard of road closure is very poor. They questioned why Council had approved the shut down policy.

Another Bulga resident had a differing view, stating there are protocols for emergency situations.

**Question:**

***What has the company been doing to manage their operational impacts?***

Nothing. **unanimous**

**Question:**

***What needs improvement?***

Everything. “ “

C&A has to be much more responsible and proactive in addressing Bulga residents concerns.

C&A has to honour the 2003 deed/agreement.

**Question:**

***What do you see as the key benefits / contributions of mining in the area?***

For the wider area, employment. However, continued economic growth is unsustainable.

For the local area, Bulga would have benefited before (pre-2003) but not now.

**Question:**

***What do you see as the key costs/impacts of mining in the area?***

1. Employment, as those employed by C&A and other mines mean people are not available to work in local shops.

2. Property values.

**Question:**

***Do the disadvantages of mining outweigh the advantages?***

Yes for Bulga, also for Singleton.

Asthma and health concerns of residents.



Singleton had 3 grocery stores in the 1970s, now it is the same. Quality has not improved since then.

**Question:**

***What do you see as the key needs of the community? How could the company provide expertise/resources (time/money) to address these needs?***

One Bulga resident said “Just leave us alone!”

C&A need to abide by the 2003 agreement and deed. Chris Salisbury (Managing Director of Rio Tinto in 2003) and ERM (consultants doing the environmental assessments) explained to Bulga locals that the cut would never come through Saddleback Ridge. C&A broke their word in 2009.

Since 2009, C&A has now argued that the use of Saddleback Ridge was never used for noise/light/air quality mitigation yet this is what was explained by ERM in 2003 as part of the door knocking meetings.

One Bulga resident said C&A need to advance underground mining but not our hill (Saddleback Ridge). **Not to destroy Saddle Ridge**

One Bulga resident said C&A could spend the next 15 years filling in the holes left by recent mining. **So, the arguments about “employment” are fallacious**

One Bulga resident said look at Bulga Coal and their operation as it was much more focused on minimal disturbance to surrounding residents and communities.

One Bulga resident mentioned the Land and Environment court case of Oatley Wines vs **Bengalla** Mine and identified the use of an independent noise expert. They suggested it as a means to ensure C&A comply with their consent conditions.

**Question:**

***How would you describe the aspirations of the community? What do you see as the future of Bulga?***

Vibrant. Diversified interests.

Bridge celebration - 100 years old. History of Bulga book to be released shortly.

The social fabric of Bulga: “you don’t know how good it is living in a place like this until you get here.”

Bulga provides catering and hosts an annual off-road racing event to generate funds for the community.

Aspirations - Bulga is a coherent community which wants to stay a coherent community. They do not want “**place-making**” people coming there and telling them how to live their lives.

If the project goes ahead, there will be nothing left.

Without the mine, Bulga will still be a vibrant community.

**Question:**

***How could the company support these aspirations? Do you think the project fits within the community's vision for the future?***

There is no trust. C&A is a company of questionable ethics that does not support Bulga.

They will not abide by government guidelines, so how can C&A be trusted to listen to the community.

**Question:**

***What are some of the better ways for Coal & Allied to provide information to you about the project moving forward (ie throughout the assessment process)?***

Tell the truth.

Don't contact the CCC the night before you intend to put in a project modification.

Carry out on any community input.

C&A should provide a contact list of C&A managers with their phone numbers. *this is done by Xstrata (Bulga Coal)*

**Question:**

***Is there any specific information about the project you would like to receive?***

One Bulga resident said they would like project details of the assessments in black and white. Tell them straight out.

Residents made reference to Bulga Coal as a responsible operator who has a more transparent process for providing information to the community on proposed operations.

**Question:**

***Do you have anything else you would like to add?***

Have the (next round of consultation) ie community information and feedback session after work hours.

One Bulga resident raised concerns about potential to water down the SIA report and the procedure used by EMM to ensure this did not occur.

## **Attendees**

Phil Reid

Belinda Passlow

Alison Drew (Carroll)

John Thompson

Melanie Caban

Kieran Caban

Philip Adamthwaite

Frank Turnball

Greg Banks

Louise Nicholls

Shayne Currie

Jane Fenwick

Ron Fenwick

Wade Smith

Marie Mitchell

Tracey Harris

Ashley Harris

Neale McCallum

Andrew Upward

Belinda Upward

Lauren Upward

Judith Leslie

Tanya Tlaskal

Garry Bailey

Denis Maizey

Stephen Williamson

Helen Upward

Graeme O'Brien

Susanne O'Brien

Heather Davis

DRAFT