

Submission against Mount Thorley Continuation Project 2014

from
Susanna O'Brien

I am extremely annoyed and disappointed to be yet again making another submission against a Mount Thorley mine extension. I consider this entire project to be an outrageous situation that has been caused by the NSW Government, Dept of Planning and Mt Thorley and Warkworth Mines. The underhand way in which this whole matter has been conducted is very upsetting. This project has been rejected twice by court judgments. As a citizen I have to live by the laws of the land but it seems multinational corporations are unable to accept such court decisions and need to apply to the NSW Government to change the laws through an act of Government. It is not fair, it's bad practice and this company now has the hide to ask the public to "Trust Them"

I feel as if I have been treated with contempt by the NSW Government, MountThorleyWarkworth (MTW) and the Dept of Planning. This proposed modification is on the land that the Land and Environment Court judgement ruled against earlier this year. The Judge said in his findings that this land, known as Saddle Ridge was to be set aside for the protection of the people living in the village of Bulga against noise and dust and for the land to remain as a Permanent Conservation Area. This land is part of 2003 Deed of Agreement that was originally promoted by MTW mine as a trade off in an earlier consent application to be used as a protection barrier for the village. This land was offered by MTW and never requested by the residents of the area

Rio Tinto is at present conducting a very public campaign "Trust us" They have placed full page advertisements in many local papers. Well Rio I did trust you. I accepted the security of the Deed Of Agreement and expanded our business enterprise, refurbished our home from a single story residence and added a second story. I now hold two property valuations for this property showing an 18% fall in value. The valuer stated this has been caused by the encroachment of mines in the area, their environmental effects on the area and the adverse publicity has had a negative affect on our property value. Rio Tinto says they cannot be held responsible for the life decisions of others. Well, Rio Tinto, I hold you personally responsible for this entire situation.

A part of the "Trust Us" campaign Rio Tinto Managers have stated as late as 22/07/14 Singleton Argus (Mark Rodgers, Operations Manager) 1300 jobs will be in danger if this continuation does not pass, yet in the Executive Summary of EIS it is quoted as 1187 employees! Another "Trust Us " fact!

Noise, Dust and Pollution are my main personal concern. We live in a beautiful valley, surrounded by National Park. These mountains act as a natural amphitheatre and sound echoes. At night I cannot open any doors or windows when it is noisy.

I'm sick of calling the mine to say my noise monitor has recorded levels well above their recommended level for their operational consent. At present the mine is about 6 km from our property and if I have this problem in 2014 what will it be like when the mine is only 2.5 km from the village? I cannot even begin to imagine what it will be like. Most likely a war Zone!!

Dust, at times I can see it, smell it, eat it and drink it! Even with a first flush system on tank water I still collect souvenirs. If I hear the excuse from the mines environmental section it is the way the wind is blowing today or it's a temperature inversion, I think I will scream. The Hunter Valley has always been known for its westerly winds so why couldn't the original consent authority consider this fact when it granted its approval.

I don't care if it's a Liberal or Labor government, Federal or State government and the Consent Authority - they should all hang their heads in shame! Artificial mountains of spoil and the poisonous ground craters which will be left and the end of mine life is untenable. For all this to have been approved in the 21st century is mind boggling. Self regulation via reporting by the mine - what a joke! Fines of \$1000. One would pay more for a traffic offence on double demerits.

I need to stress the seriousness of property values. After the previous PAC Hearing there was an increase of compulsory acquisition of houses in the village. Some properties were not included in the acquisitions even if they were located in the same road or street. This has divided the village into the yes and no group. Acquisitions should be available to all residents of Bulga, if they decide they need to leave the area. Rio Tinto should accept responsibility for their own actions.

I have consulted with several real estate agents and property valuers on this matter. Everyone in the area has been affected through falling property prices, particularly the top end of the market. It is estimated up to 20% in Bulga. All agents and valuers have a "duty of disclosure" and must tell prospective purchasers of local conditions and the effect of coal mines on the area. Mortgage Insurance may choose not to cover the cost of a loan. (similar to flood prone areas). Buyers have no confidence in the Bulga area. Put simply, there is no demand for Bulga properties. We have a negative market area.

I have lived in this region all my life. Until you live in a village environment, you don't realize what a rich and rewarding experience it is. At Bulga we have a Pub, a Shop and Service Station, a Church, a Hall, a Sports/Recreation Ground with Tennis Court, a local Fire Station, a Police Residence and a local School at Milbrodale. We also have a National Parks Office and a new District Rural Fire Head Quarters under construction. We host several tourist events - Off Road Racing (25 years) Tuff Truck Events (20 years) and over the last two years we held a centenary event for our historical timber bridge and our Progress Association had a very successful launch of our book "The History Of Bulga" with 300 visitors in attendance. We do not want our village to suffer the demise of other areas, eg. Warkworth, Ravensworth and Camberwell villages.

Closure of Wallaby Scrub Road

This road is also part of the original Convict Old North Road and has an historical significance, should be part of our heritage and therefore remain untouched. It provides a link not only to the locals, mine workers, but is used as a road by interstate traffic providing a route to both Windsor/Sydney or Cessnock to the F3 Freeway eg travellers from Dubbo, Gunnedah and Moree. Residents have noted over 700 vehicles movements per day.

Light Spillage. The cumulative effect of light between Warkworth Mine and Bulga Coal is unbelievable. At night the entire sky is illuminated with such effect it looks like a city in the

middle of a big black hole. To increase the spillage is disastrous for the surrounding areas. We have visitors to the area known who make comment about the daylight in the middle of the night. One of the highlights that our property has is the dark skies and the beautiful stars on show.

Tourism. We own a vineyard and have made a large monetary investment in this region. I know that the members of the Broke Fordwich Wine and Tourism Association have invested much time and money promoting this valley as the “tranquil side of the valley” as a tourist destination. Our Hunter Valley is the second most popular tourist destination in NSW after Sydney. Already guests can now see, breath, hear and drink the effect of mining over the area!

Reclamation. To date in my mind I consider the present level of reclamation construction disgraceful. The present mine operated as a great rate of production and the reclamation does not keep pace. If the new proposal is to be anything like the present production then I am very worried for the future. I personally think the consenting authority should hand their head in shame as the whole site is a disgrace. Rio Tinto only started building the bung walls along side Putty Road after the residents started complaining about the noise , dust and pollution. They started during the first Pac Hearing in 2010. They are still way behind in their reclamation as there is still dump after dump of uncovered material. I personally feel they will never catch up.

Warkworth Sands. This matter was covered by Judge Preston in his determination. His findings are still current so why is this in this new application? Why should Warkworth Mine be allowed to decimate my back yard and replace it 100 km away in the Goulburn River National Park? (part 3a planning regulations /off set) What advantage is that to me, I live at Bulga not in the Goulburn River National Park? If the NSW Government only receives 2% budget income in royalties from coal, won't the upkeep of this new park cost more to administrate and run. Is not the Government trying to cut their existing cost. Why take on more! Rio can collect all the seeds they want , replant all they want but it will be to no avail. How can this company expect to regenerate these sand when they took 400 million years to form? The Warkworth sands are unique and can never be replaced. It's the topography and for this reason alone it should be preserved. The risk is too high! I am a grandmother who wants to speak out. We are only caretakers of the environment, it belongs to our children's children. I want my grandchildren to know that I stood up and fought for the preservation of the unique Warkworth Sands.

Water. I write from personal experience as my family originally owned land at Doctors Creek, which is part of the present Warkworth mine site. Why wasn't a study compiled on the effects of natural water run off and the effects of mining on ground water before mining commenced. At present Warkworth Mine has a huge mountain of overburden where once was undulating and flat ground with water holes and Mount Thorley/Bulga Coal which has established their reclamation (Opposite on MR 503) has now a flat surface where there was once a hill (part Saddle Ridge). This reconstruction has had a big effect on our weather patterns. We are receiving less and less rain fall and it is very hot and dry during summer. I have observed when clouds form they split and the rain falls to the south and the north of the valley. When rain does fall over the site the water (now acidic after running down these slag piles and lying on the ground surface) is pumped out along the road side and diverted into Doctors Creek which then flows into Loders Creek and finally runs into the Hunter River. This water is then used by farmers for irrigation, so the effects flow on through the food chain.

Conclusion:

In conclusion I realize mining has been very beneficial to our NSW and national economy but it comes at a price. The unfairness must be addressed.

At present the pendulum has moved too far from the middle. It needs to come back into balance. I would be in favour of an underground operation, as this would result in a win win situation. Contemporary underground mining techniques are far more efficient and do not leave huge voids with capacity greater than that of Sydney Harbour. A win for miners and their jobs and the residents of Bulga would not have the noise and dust. And it is a big win for the environment and the future.

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