

“Reclaiming our Valley”

Hunter Communities Network

PO Box 14 Singleton 2330

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Major Project Assessment
Department of Planning & Infrastructure
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Sydney NSW 2001

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Submission of Objection

Modification to the Wilpinjong Coal Mine Project (05_0021 MOD 5)

The Hunter Communities Network (HCN) is an alliance of community based groups and individuals impacted by the current coal industry and concerned about the ongoing rapid expansion of coal and coal seam gas exploration and mining in the region.

HCN is lodging a strong objection to the proposed modification number 5 to the Wilpinjong Coal Mine in the south western edge of the Hunter Valley because of the impacts of the operation under its current approval.

The extreme social impacts of the Wilpinjong Mine have not been adequately identified or assessed and the economic justification for the mine expansion does not recognise the significance of cumulative loss of community.

The environmental and social impact predictions for the current Wilpinjong Mine operations have been entirely inadequate and proven to be incorrect. The proposal to expand the mine footprint to access a further 3 million tonnes of coal during the life of the current approval indicates that incorrect information or assumptions were used when the annual extraction rate was increased from 13mtpa to 15mtpa under modification 3 in 2010

The argument that the mine will not be able to meet maximum extraction rate from 2018 with current approvals indicates a lack of previous information on which to approve an increase in extraction rate or poor predictions of the resource.

The lack of adequate information associated with previous modification approvals should be carried by the mining company, not by the surrounding environment and the community.

HCN is concerned that the modification includes approval for an on-site light vehicle servicing workshop. This need has been caused by the loss of the local mechanical services provided by the general store in Wollar. The purchase of the store by Peabody Energy, caused by the mine impact on the proprietor, has caused the loss of mechanical services to the local farming community and is contrary to all the information provided to the community before Wilpinjong Mine was approved.

The promise to the local community was that light vehicle maintenance would be carried out at the Wollar general store to maintain the business and to provide an ongoing service and employment to the broader community.

The application for this service to now be provided privately on the mine site is further indication that the social impacts of mining on a rural area are significant. This issue has not been clearly identified or addressed in the environmental assessment of the proposed modification.

The area of land now owned by Peabody's Energy in the Wollar district is significant with very few private properties left in the area as evident in Figures 4a and 4b in the assessment documents. This has been an outcome of major intrusions of noise across the district that were not predicted in the original assessment and approvals process.

The result of this major land acquisition is that many properties are now stranded assets that cannot be sold on the property market because of the influence of the mine in the district and the ongoing impacts of noise and spontaneous combustion.

The social and economic impact of stranded assets has not been assessed in the socio-economic assessment of the proposed modification 5.

The management of spontaneous combustion by Wilpinjong Mine has been very poor and has caused a major loss of amenity in the district. This is further indication that previous predictions of this environmental impact have been understated.

HCN also objects to the proposed increase in blasting frequency with a higher maximum instantaneous charge. This is because of the hard nature of the coal seam which has proven to be of difficult quality for the contract to Macquarie Generation.

It is well known throughout the Hunter region that the quality of coal provided by the Wilpinjong Mine to Bayswater Power Station is very poor and has caused considerable costs to the maintenance of equipment. HCN is concerned that these issues have not been addressed within the modification 5 assessment while being the cause of proposed increased environmental impacts.

HCN is of the opinion that once Bayswater Power station has been sold to a private operator, the NSW Government has no further responsibility to find a coal supply for electricity generation. The new operators will be able to source better quality coal on the open market.

Many members of HCN live along the coal chain in the Hunter Region. There is strong support across the community for coal trains to be covered to lessen the levels of coal dust in the region.

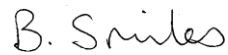
HCN recommends that the currently approved 20 coal train movements per day for the Wilpinjong operation be required to be covered.

In conclusion, the Wilpinjong Mine has caused the total disintegration of a rural village and surrounding community. The loss of neighbours, social support systems, rural firebrigade, churches, sporting bodies and the threat of closure of the school has not been identified in the socio-economic study.

HCN is concerned that social values and the future of rural communities has not been adequately considered by the NSW Government or recorded in any way by the industry environmental assessment process.

The Wilpinjong Mine has caused much greater social and environmental impacts than predicted. The industry regulators are struggling to keep up with current operational problems. The mine should not be expanded over an additional 70 ha for the price of 3 million tonnes of coal.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "B. Smiles".

Bev Smiles
Convenor