

Bathurst Community Climate Action Network

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Bylong Coal Project Application by KEPCO.

The Bathurst Community Climate Action Network was formed out of a public meeting in June 2007 by a group of citizens concerned to address climate change in the interest of the environment. It now has a membership of around 130. Our members are deeply concerned about the impact of the burning of fossil fuel on the global climate and, specifically, concerned about the impact of coal mining on rural communities in our region. We believe that the extraction of fossil fuel for energy purposes is largely unnecessary given the increasing efficiency, availability and affordability of renewable energy.

We view with particular trepidation the proposal by the Korean power company, Kepco, to mine 6.5 million tonnes of coal per year (Mtpa) over 25 years from 2 open cut pits (8 yrs) and an underground mine in the highly fertile Bylong Valley. Presently the world's leaders are preparing to meet in Paris to develop strategies aimed at reducing the prospects that global carbon emissions will lead to catastrophic climate change. It makes no sense for the NSW government to approve any new coal mines which would exacerbate the very problems which the global leaders are addressing. Specifically, it makes no sense to approve a coal mine of this scale in a location of prime agricultural land which has the potential, undisturbed, to contribute to feeding the global population indefinitely.

The granting of coal exploration licenses and water allocations in the Bylong Valley has been mired in political corruption. It would be a great pity if the current government were to compound this with decisions which would have wide-ranging negative local, regional and global repercussions.

Beyond these fundamental concerns about the need to veto any new coal mining licenses in NSW we have a number of specific concerns about the negative impact of the Kepco proposal on agriculture, bio-diversity and cultural heritage.

The predicted long-term impacts on prime agricultural land and water systems in the Bylong Valley are unacceptable and will not be mitigated through proposed offsets and rehabilitation. The renowned Tarwyn Park natural sequence farming processes will be destroyed.

A significant area of prime agricultural land will be destroyed: the mine footprint will disturb 2,875 ha of land including 440 ha of Bioregional Significant Agricultural Land (BSAL), 260 ha being destroyed in open cut, plus 700 ha of mapped Critical Equine Industry Cluster land. The proposal to replace BSAL at another location is untested and highly risky.

Impacts on groundwater and surface water will be significant. The highly connected alluvial aquifer system within the stressed Bylong River catchment will have predicted peak losses of up to 295 million litres per year (ML/yr). Loss of base flows to the Bylong River is predicted to be 918 ML/yr. The mine proposes to use up to 1,942 ML/yr which is over 75% of the annual rainfall recharge. The river system is over-allocated and local farmers will lose important water supply.

As part of Bathurst's recognition of 200 years of white settlement, BCCAN recently organised an exhibition of 200 plants and animals. White settlement in our region has had a negative cumulative impact on bio-diversity and the proposed mine will contribute to further plant and animal extinction.

The mine disturbance area has very high biodiversity values that will not be mitigated through the proposed offset arrangements. Nationally endangered species recorded in the area include the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby, New Holland Mouse, Regent Honeyeater and Spotted-tailed Quoll.

Three entirely new plant species have been recorded in the area and a significant area of critically endangered Grassy Box Gum Woodland will be destroyed along with habitat for 17 threatened birds and 7 threatened plants.

As well, the area has Aboriginal cultural heritage significance: 239 sites have been recorded in the study area with 25 regarded as being of high local or regional significance (including an ochre quarry, grinding grooves and rock shelters); 144 sites have been identified at risk from mine impacts with 102 in the open cut area.

For all these reasons BCCAN opposes the proposed coal project in the Bylong Valley and supports the continuation of productive agriculture there.

Tracey Carpenter , President.