



Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.

PO Box 188
East Maitland NSW 2323
1st May 2017

Objection to Wambo Modification 17 – South Bates Extension

http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/page/development-categories/mining--petroleum--extractive-industries/mining/?action=view_job&job_id=8124

Hunter Environment Lobby Inc. (HEL) is a regional community-based environmental organization that has been active for well over 20 years on the issues of environmental degradation, species and habitat loss, and climate change.

In October 2006, HEL raised objection to the proposed Modification 6 of Wambo Mine, and the proposition to re-route and destroy North Wambo Creek. HEL warned at that time of irreversible consequences and significant environmental effects.

Further to this 2006 objection to Mod 6, in our submission of objection to the Mod 12 development on 6 May 2016, HEL outlined major concerns and called once again for an independent regional study of mining impacts on the Hunter River, as well as its tributaries.

HEL has also had continuing concerns in regard to the cumulative biodiversity impacts of mining in the Hunter Region and the lack of adequate protection of biodiversity offsets and unreliable monitoring and regulation of their management.

Once again, in this Modification 17, HEL has concerns that the mine is very close to the World Heritage listed Wollemi National Park and will severely impact on the Wambo Creek systems, Wollombi Brook and Hunter catchment, surrounding farm land and neighbouring communities, Aboriginal cultural heritage and biodiversity.

HEL submitted an objection to the expansion of underground operations, which has since just been approved in December 2016. Now there is a proposal for more expansion of underground mining.

A large joint venture project, United-Wambo open cut mine (with neighbouring miner Glencore) is currently before the Department of Planning. These ongoing extensions and large super pit proposals are not sustainable developments, HEL believes. The cumulative impact of mining in this area of the Hunter is vast and the NSW Govt is refusing to adequately assess the long-term costs.

The project should be a new project proposal, not a 75W modification, because a new mining lease is required and an extension of the development application area.. The scale of the proposal with 9 new longwall panels should be assessed as a new project.

The development of a new mine with nine longwall panels within 120m of the World Heritage listed Wollemi National Park is unacceptable. This will cause rock falls and instability of cliff lines and steep slopes. This outcome is unacceptable, we have seen far too much damage from subsidence in the Hunter region, Western coalfields and the Southern coalfields. The photos of subsidence damage at the Dendrobium mine, as appear in Appendix A, increases our concern that subsidence from this proposal will not be negligible. We have also seen significant impacts in many streams, creeks and rivers in the Hunter and other NSW coalfields.

Further subsidence under North Wambo Creek and the creek diversion including the associated alluvial aquifers is too great a cumulative impact. Increased ponding, cracking and loss of base flows cannot be approved.

Peabody Energy has not fulfilled current commitments to address long term subsidence impacts on Wambo Creek. There is no confidence that any commitments to meet subsidence impacts on North Wambo Creek will be met.

Wambo Mine already has approval for the extensive Wambo South underground mine that has not yet commenced. This approval was only granted in December 2016 and already Peabody Energy has changed the justification for this modification by proposing to delay it. There is no confidence in the socio-economic analysis or predicted public benefit of projects, that form the main basis of approval, when approved projects can be delayed indefinitely.

HEL maintains that the proposal to extend the mine life to produce 11.3 mtpa of coal for another 7 years until 2039 is a climate injustice. It is unacceptable that both government and industry can put their collective heads in the sand on such an important issue as climate change.

The Wambo mine produces large quantities of gas that is released into the atmosphere or flared. The greenhouse gas emissions from the operation are seen to be too high, by any standards This volatile source of methane must be left undisturbed in the ground. We do not consider that the predicted greenhouse gas emissions from this proposal, as assessed in Appendix J accurate. Even so, the stated increase of 0.05% of national emissions over the period of mining will threaten Australia's ability to meet the Paris Agreement.

The area of the proposed new mine expansion contains habitat for 37 threatened fauna species, including 11 listed for protection under Federal environmental legislation. The majority of the area of impact is covered by the critically endangered *Central Hunter Valley Eucalypt Forest and Woodland* ecological community. We do not support the conclusion that subsidence impacts will be negligible, particularly on the steep slopes.

It is unacceptable that 34 hectares of the area of impact have not yet been surveyed for Aboriginal cultural heritage sites. This assessment work must be

conducted and exhibited for public comment prior to any further progress of the planning process for this proposal.

Cumulative impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage, water sources, biodiversity, neighbours and Wollemi National Park have not been assessed to include surrounding large mines at Hunter Valley Operations, Warkworth –Mt Thorley Complex, United and Bulga operations.

HEL has raised the issues of cumulative impacts on environments and communities for well over twenty years to date, these issues are very important for the health of populations, environments, rivers and aquifers.

HEL does not have confidence that Peabody Energy can be trusted to meet mine closure and rehabilitation commitments. The recent recapitalisation under Chapter 11 in the US included reneging on \$2.7b of rehabilitation liabilities shows this.

We do not want to see that happen in the Hunter Valley, it is too important an agricultural and population base area for that. We hope that this government department takes its role seriously enough to stand up to foreign multi-national coal companies.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jan Davis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "D".

Jan Davis
President