

## **Submission**

# **Wilpinjong Extension Project**

## **Application SSD 6764**

Peter Green  
22<sup>nd</sup> Feb, 2016

Please accept this submission in relation to the proposal to extend the extraction licence for the Wilpinjong Colliery Extension Project. I object to the proposal. The basis for this objection is presented below.

### **Current Situation and History :**

Wilpinjong Coal Mine in the south western edge of the Hunter catchment is owned and operated by Peabody Energy US. It has been operating since 2006 and has had severe impacts on the local community of Wollar and surrounds. The 28 sq km open cut coal mine lies between Goulburn River National Park and Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve. The mine has current approval to produce 12.5 million tonnes per annum of saleable coal until 2027. This extension proposes to destroy a further 800 ha of land and extend the mine's life until 2033. The original justification for the mine was to supply low quality coal to Bayswater Power Station. Six subsequent modifications have resulted in increased export capacity while increasing the cumulative impacts on the environment and community.

This extension will bring the mine to within 1.5km of the village of Wollar. The company's own Social Impact Assessment identifies that this will accelerate the decline of a community that was vibrant healthy until the commencement of mining some ten years ago. Extending the Wilpinjong mine would be the nail in the coffin for Wollar.

### **Points of Objection:**

We are fast approaching a time in human history when this short lived 'age of coal' has run its race. Consequently, such proposals go against all sensible precautions, and merely serve to provide some possible short term financial gain for a few vested interests. Against this is the long term damage to our environments, natural and social, that such developments threaten and are sure deliver. Key points against this proposal include :-

1. Recent open cut coal mining in Australia has an invidious history of destroying small rural communities. In fact, in too many cases the village is obliterated, as is the earth on which it stood. Needless to add, the rural industries that surrounded and supported each community were also obliterated. In some cases, the modus operandi of the mining corporations have been to divide-and-conquer, sometimes leading to internal friction in the communities before they topple. In many cases landholders have no future, but also have no means of selling tainted properties, and are ruined, both financially and emotionally. All the while, governments sit on their hands, or trumpet the supposed financial wonders that each mine will deliver. The recent attempt to give primacy to commercial financial gain ahead of environmental, human or social health underscores this tawdry relationship. In this case, the extension of Wilpinjong Mine will destroy the community of Wollar. More widely, the cumulative social impact of loss of population through mining projects from Ulan to Bylong has not been considered.

2. The noise assessment, monitoring and mitigation measures are highly inadequate. Too often we are supposed to be comforted by a reliance on 'adaptive mining' practices. It is unethical to rely on such mitigation in situations where the damage cannot be mitigated. This applies, for example, to destroyed aquifers, cliff collapse and creek bed cracking. There is also a strong distrust in the community, based on case histories, of biased reporting of consultants in DAs. Until we have a situation whereby all consultants are chosen by independent government panels, with no influence by mining companies, this distrust will remain. In the meantime, all consultants know that, if they produce a report unfavourable to the mining client, there is markedly reduced likelihood that they will attract further work from that client. Occasionally, courageous consultants speak up.

3. Air quality has not been assessed against the new standards adopted in November 2015. Given the current worldwide focus on PM2.5 and PM10 particulate pollution, such as in the Hunter Valley, and the links being found between such airborne particulate pollution and increased illness and mortality, it is inconceivable that any government would not be applying the most stringent conditions and limitations on emitters of this pollution. Not to do so reeks of third world corrupt politics. The revolving door between MPs and their staff, on the one hand, and mining company executives and consultants, on the other hand, makes it utterly impossible for anyone concerned about the deleterious effects of open cut coal mining to have faith in the political / approvals process.

4. The cumulative impact on biodiversity, aboriginal cultural heritage, water sources, greenhouse gas emissions, community and rural industry has not been rigorously assessed. That should not surprise, given the points raised above, viz the government's intent to give primacy to corporate financial returns above all community and environmental health.

5. Most observers, indeed the general thinking population, understands that coal, particularly steaming coal, is in the throes of a death spiral. Globally, at least three quarters of demonstrated coal reserves need to be left unburnt if we are to avoid an existential risk to our life support systems. The market in China is shrinking because they belatedly realise that their rush into modernity, underpinned by coal, is killing them. The export market to India is similarly in decline, partly because the poor who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of coal can't afford to pay for Australian coal, and partly because new electricity tenders are demonstrating that renewables have quickly reached grid parity with thermal coal. Yet, in the face of this market meltdown, we in Australia are seeing such commercially unsound and environmentally damaging proposals still being presented to government. At Wilpinjong the ongoing coal extraction will produce an additional 20 million tonnes of greenhouse gas per year, which will exacerbate the impacts of climate change, and is at odds with Australia's commitments under the Paris Accord. No wonder astute and trained scientists make it known that we are unlikely to meet our GHG targets, pathetic as they are.

6. Rampant land clearing is one of the shameful legacies of the European settlement in Australia. The early settlers were few and had little understanding of the consequences of their actions. But now we know better, and ought to be cherishing and preserving the remnants. This is the crisis that is the Leard forest obliteration. The Wilpinjong proposal entails the removal 354 ha of remnant native vegetation impacting 24 threatened species. Are we so ignorant, so obsessed by money, so totally blinded by this quest to totally populate and exploit this land, that we cannot see the lunacy of the process?

Also, rural communities, already damaged by modern characteristics like improved transport (with consequent relocations to bigger population centres) are being badly hurt by such developments.

Equally odious and perverted are the biodiversity offsets. There are attempts to include them in the approvals process elsewhere in NSW, even when no such equivalent ecosystems exist. But the true immorality is on display when money is accepted in lieu of equivalent land. In the proposal in question, it seems that there not be sufficient habitat for the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater.

7. The extension removes existing buffer zones for the Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve. This seems to be an excellent example of how damage is done via death by a thousand cuts. Constant approvals, often starting from a minimalist approval, work up to a fully destructive project.

8. There has been recent media coverage of the long held fear of environmentalists that bonds lodged by mining companies are utterly inadequate to properly rehabilitate. At times, as was tried on at Coalpac (Cullen Bullen), further expansion plans are supported by the supposed ability of the expansion to pay for rehabilitation of existing damage, despite the requirement for sufficient rehabilitation funds supposedly being held in escrow. This whole issue exemplifies the greedy reality of mining in Australia, that of privatising the profits and socialising the losses. It is often manifested by the legal entity going broke and being unable to fund the rehabilitation. Or the company selling the moribund project to an unsuspecting purchaser, then disappearing overseas and being untouchable.

At Wilpinjong, the extension will leave 3 final voids in the landscape that will impact the local environment and waterways for hundreds of years into the future. In drier times and drier areas, these deep holes suck the water table down from the surrounding area as a permanent process of destruction of arable land. So, the ongoing impacts on groundwater and surface water systems will be greater than predicted. This is a completely unacceptable legacy.

9. The predicted job numbers are overstated compared with the current workforce extracting the same volume of coal. This will not be a surprise to anyone familiar with the research by the think tank The Australia Institute. The mining industry, including coal mining, greatly overstate their workforce, the taxes they pay and the royalties they pay. The government is seemingly unaware of this (unlikely) or is unwilling to advertise it. Yet in the most part these companies are foreign owned, about 83%, with no interest in doing anything else than repatriating maximum funds back overseas.

10. Peabody Energy exemplifies the malaise in the coal industry. It is in deep financial distress and may not be fit to meet all obligations. An examination of its share price over recent years is sobering. I believe that the correct terminology for this company's financial situation is a 'basket case'. It needs to demonstrate that sufficient capital is being held to enable full rehabilitation of the current pit.

11. Reportedly, the contract to supply AGL's Bayswater Power Station can be met by the current approval.

12. In summary, the proposal to continue extracting low quality coal while causing irreversible environmental and social damage cannot be justified. Society will almost certainly be left with a massively expensive task of rehabilitation, and in the meantime the combustion of this coal will further degrade our global environment. Locally, more farmland will turn into wasteland, as in the Hunter and Boggabri. This is simply an insane proposal, failing on so many counts. We need enlightened governance, not undue influence by a largely foreign-owned, self-interested industry.

I have not made any reportable political donation.

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