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## **The Wilderness Society Newcastle submission on the Warkworth Coal Mine Expansion**

27<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Dear Ms Donnelley,

### **RE: Submission to the Warkworth Coal Mine Expansion DA 300-9-2002-i MOD 6)**

The Wilderness Society Newcastle appreciates the opportunity to object to the proposed project the 'Warkworth Coal Mine Expansion' While not as large as the Warkworth Extension Project, still the subject of a Supreme Court appeal, the Warkworth Modification project is a proposed serious expansion of the coal mine into the same area that the NSW Land and Environment Court previously ruled should be protected from mining.

The modification project would allow Rio Tinto to mine part of an area they have previously agreed to protect, including part of Saddle Ridge, which currently shields the residents of the village of Bulga from the worst impacts of the mine.

There are some serious ecological impacts that form the basis to which The Wilderness Society Newcastle object to the proposal.

### **BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS**

As per the Rio Tinto submission 30 hectares of vegetation will be destroyed by this open cut coal mine expansion including 16 hectares of Endangered Ecological Communities and total of 21 threatened fauna species including 14 bird and seven mammal species have been recorded within the study area (Cumberland Ecology 2010). These EECs include 3 hectares of Central Hunter Grey Box Ironbark Woodland and approximately 13 hectares of Central Hunter Ironbark Spotted Gum Grey Box Forest. The tree hollows in these forests take up to 200 years to develop and are critical to the survival of many threatened animal species for breeding and sanctuary from prey.

This area expands into an area that Rio Tinto agreed in 2003 to protect in a permanent conservation area, and in which open cut mining was rejected by the Land and Environment Court earlier this year. The mining of promised "offset" areas is a perverse exploitation of the law and should not be tolerated by the Department of Planning. Also, the proposed "offset" would not protect equivalent habitat to that proposed to be bulldozed.

The proposed area to be cleared includes important drought refuge for migratory and threatened bird species including the Little Lorikeet, the Speckled Warbler and the Grey crowned Babbler. The Regent Honeyeater also known to be found in this area of the Hunter Valley has recently been updated to be a "critically endangered species", facing an extremely high risk of extinction in New South Wales in the immediate future. This area is home to a range of threatened species and provides significant tree hollows and habitat amongst a heavily cleared landscape.

Other threatened species to be impacted include the Large-eared Pied Bat, Brown Treecreeper, Squirrel Glider, Turquoise Parrot and the Glossy Black Cockatoo, they are also present on the site.

## **OFF-SETS**

The proponent, Rio Tinto, signed a Deed of Agreement in 2003 promising not to mine Saddle Ridge, which protects the town of Bulga from the worst impacts of the Warkworth mine. Rio committed to approach Singleton Council and have Saddle Ridge and the endangered woodland around it rezoned for environmental protection. The NSW Land and Environment Court has previously rejected Rio's application to mine Saddle Ridge.

## **SOCIAL & CULTURAL IMPACTS**

Significant Aboriginal heritage sites, including artifact scatter sites will be impacted if the proposal goes ahead. Aboriginal people consulted expressed that all sites are sacred and they would rather not have them disturbed.

There is strong community concern about the proposal's impacts on biodiversity, air quality, and visual amenity. Too many Hunter Valley villages have already been swallowed up by coal mining. Bulga, a close-knit community with deep historical significance for the Hunter, must be protected.

## **JOBS AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS**

Rio Tinto have provided no economic assessment in support of the project, and their bland public statements to the effect that this project is needed to maintain jobs have not been supported by any information provided.

Rio Tinto's estimates of the employment and economic benefits of expanding the Warkworth mine have previously been rejected by the NSW Land and Environment Court, and they remain untrustworthy. Threats of jobs losses by the proponent should not be a factor for consideration when assessing the merits of this project, and they certainly should not take precedence over the protection of public health, adherence to the Deed of Agreement to protect Saddle Ridge from coal mining, and the right for the community of Bulga to persist.

Kind Regards,

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The Wilderness Society Newcastle