

18 June 2015

Ms Carolyn McNally
The Secretary
The Department of Planning & Environment
GPO Box 39
SYDNEY
NSW 2001

Dear Ms McNally,

Objection to Drayton South Coal Project Application Number: SSD 6875

The Hunter Environment & Local Protection group or HELP is an organisation that I have started up out of frustration over the lack of support for the local agriculture – including dairy, cattle, lucerne producers, wine, equine and tourism - industries in the Hunter Valley.

I, together with many people who do not live in the area, believe that these industries could disappear with the approval of the Anglo American, Drayton South open cut coalmine project.

While I do not live in the Hunter Valley region, like many people from the city and wider NSW, along with tourists from around Australia and beyond, I regularly visit the region and appreciate all that it has to offer.

I rely on good governance to protect the farming communities so that we may continue to enjoy the tourism aspects and supply of healthy fresh produce that the Hunter has become renowned for more than nearly 200 years. I am committed to protecting this region because of the lack of prime agricultural land in NSW.

The people I represent in Sydney are very concerned about what mining is doing to our environment, agriculture and tourism in the Hunter region – including the effect the Drayton South mine will have on the water systems, given its close proximity to the Hunter River.

The visual impact of these open cut mines cannot be underestimated when it comes to tourism in the region.

I have had many people sign my petition on the future we want to leave our children, often remarking on the contrast between the beautifully aligned grape vines with rolling hills and grazing cattle in the Hunter Valley, compared with the dirty dusty noisy facade of the open cut coal mines in the region.

I do not believe that Anglo American should be allowed to devalue the neighbouring properties and decimate their businesses for the sake of overseas profits and a short-term gain for the government.

I have met with many of the farmers in the region and they have told me of their complete helplessness and disappointment in a system which appears to allow those with the deepest pockets to ignore the findings of fifteen government appointed experts in the independent planning and assessment commission and simply reapply again after this mine had been refused on the grounds of presenting an unacceptable risk to the long term businesses in the region.

This area of the Hunter has become renowned for its agricultural significance around the world. The agriculture industry in Australia has incredibly high standards in comparison to other nations and this was highlighted recently with the hepatitis scare that came about as a result of imported frozen berries from China being contaminated due to less stringent health regulations in its agricultural industry.

Australia takes its water, air and soil quality very seriously and in many cases it is our marketing advantage to the world. This is why it is not only about strong regulations with food and water quality but also perception to international markets that NSW is a clean, green state and this advantage allows us to market produce at a premium rate. Once this advantage is lost, so too is our agriculture industry.

I spent nine years as a federal politician representing Southwest Sydney and I have to say from a position of knowledge that I am deeply concerned about the process for approval that this mine is undertaking.

It appears that everyone involved with this application has no clear direction of the approval or refusal process and it is my hope that the system should protect long-term land holders and significant agricultural industries against the bullying tactics of the big mining companies and provide surety for all invested parties.

It is the belief of HELP supporters that a significant number of jobs will be lost forever if the Drayton South mine is allowed to go ahead. These sustainable jobs, in addition to sustainable agricultural industries are the backbone of our regional communities.

Some 300 people are employed directly by the two horse studs Coolmore and Darley and another 26 through the winery Hollydene that separates these two properties. Thousands more are employed in dairy farming, wineries, breeding and racing and agriculture more generally.

It would appear that by Anglo American's own admission, this new mining licence would only provide temporary jobs for a maximum of 15 years and yet they are quite happy to annihilate businesses that have been in the area for nearly 200 years and will be there for hundreds more, providing produce and livelihoods for thousands of Australians.

In the context of the recent Paris agreement on carbon emissions, the coal industry's long-term future is in doubt. It is futile to build a new mine at Drayton South in a dying industry. In 2014, Australian Mining Magazine estimated that more than 2 500 jobs in the coal sector were cut as a result of downsizing operations or shutting down operations completely.

Once the coal is gone or the demand or thermal coal price drops due to the market alternatives, the mine will end and any jobs it has created will also end. Why then would we be so foolish to risk it?

The farmers can't do anything with a bare hole in the ground. Once they, the winemakers and the thoroughbred breeders are gone its lost forever. Why would you risk the future for a mine that may last for just 15 years?

It is my hope that the government has a more forward-thinking vision for NSW than this short-term gain.

Anglo American's approach to this submission process has been nothing short of a poker game where they play a game of Bluff with the government.

Sadly though, the stakes are high and although it may be small change for Anglo American, the farmers are going broke trying to stop this mine from affecting their livelihoods and decimating the tourism industry.

First, they stated that they could not make the mine viable if they were to reduce its size and now they have reapplied and miraculously come up with a financial restructuring that will allow them to continue to employ the same amount of people as their first submission, with a smaller area.

Anglo American have been able to find savings even though the coal prices have dropped dramatically since their first submission and they can still provide the same revenue. How can this be?

On behalf of the struggling farmers in the Hunter Valley and the concerned citizens of Sydney and NSW more broadly, I lodge my strong objection to Anglo American's application for an open cut coal mine at Drayton South – a site that was rejected once by the NSW Government's independent experts and should not be allowed to proceed.

Pat Farmer AM | President | HELP

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