

dcs.s13/02

21 June 2013

The Director, Mining Projects
Major Projects Assessment
Department of Planning and Infrastructure
GPO Box 39
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Director

SUBMISSION: WALLARAH 2 LONGWALL COAL MINE PROPOSAL SSD-4974

I wish to make a submission on the Wallarah 2 longwall coal mine proposed for an area north-west of Wyong. The area to be undermined and the surface facility at Buttonderry fall within the electorate of Lake Macquarie. The proposal is therefore of significant interest and concern to my constituents.

Having represented the State electorate of Lake Macquarie since 2007, I am aware of the background of this project and the previous rejection of an almost identical proposal by the then State Government in 2011.

I have received briefings on this proposal from proponents for the mine, including management of the joint venture company and from constituents opposed, and have carefully considered all arguments.

With an estimated 1,000 jobs expected to be created over the lifespan of the mine, I recognise that the proposal offers a significant employment opportunity for the Central Coast, along with the associated economic benefits that job creation brings.

I also realise that as a society we still rely heavily on coal as an energy source, and despite my view that we should be moving to develop alternative clean technologies, I accept the reality that we will remain highly dependent on fossil fuel for some time to come.

However, I cannot support this proposed mine because of the threat it poses to the significant water catchment in the area to be mined, as well as other adverse impacts it will or may have, on the local community and environment.

My primary concern with this proposal has been the risk that groundwater and surface water in this important catchment area could be adversely affected by mining activities. Regardless of assurances from the company that this risk has been addressed and is minimal, I am not convinced that they can guarantee the integrity of these watercourses will not be compromised.

In a quote to *Australian Mining* magazine on April 17 last year, Wallarah 2 General Manager Kerry Heywood sought to dispel concerns about the mine's impact on water by saying the following:

"Even if there is an impact, it is only likely to be between five and 14 per cent. A minimal amount."

I find this admission most disturbing. When we are talking about the quality of a water catchment that provides more than 50 per cent of the drinking water for the Central Coast, I do not regard an 'impact' of between five and 14 per cent to be inconsequential. I am also troubled by the use of the word 'likely', which does not suggest the company has confidence in its own modelling.

In a statement to a public inquiry in 2007 into the first Wallarah 2 proposal, I made clear my concerns in this regard, telling the inquiry there was no certainty the mine would not deliver the disastrous impacts on water systems in the surrounding area that have resulted from other longwall operations. I pointed to the example within my electorate of Diega Creek, near Wakefield, which suffered a complete loss of flow after it was undermined, damage that was attributed to subsidence.

Just one crack in the Dooralong and Yarramalong valley floors could result in a reduction of the catchment-sourced water supply for the Central Coast.

The mining company has admitted there will be subsidence from the mine. The Environmental Impact Statement identifies 245 homes at risk, and the potential damage to those properties is another matter of concern.

Another issue that has been raised by residents who live near the sites of the proposed surface facilities is the potential dust fallout from coal stockpiles. The health risks associated with air pollution from mining and coal transportation is a significant and growing matter of concern in the Hunter Valley and neighbouring mining districts and I do not believe new mining operations should be considered in proximity to residential areas while these issues remain unresolved.

Constituents have also raised with me concerns that noise impacts from the mining operations have not been adequately addressed and that the habitat of threatened species will be destroyed or significantly disrupted.

As has been my argument in the past, I am not convinced that the economic benefits of the mine are justified by the potential environmental and social problems it poses. In considering the use of caution with mining in such a context, I do note that the coal to be won would be destined for the export market and while there would be local economic benefit, the significant benefit would be to a foreign company.

That in itself is not a bad thing, however I do believe that it is a factor in determining what level of risk a community should be asked to accept when weighing risks against the benefits. It remains my strong view that in determining this application the consent authority should err on the side of caution and reject this proposal.

I note this application is ostensibly the same as that which was previously refused, without substantial additional information to justify its re-submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Piper', with a large, stylized initial 'G'.

Greg Piper, MP
Member for Lake Macquarie