

Director, Mining Projects  
Development Assessment Systems & Approvals  
Department of Planning & Infrastructure  
GPO Box 39  
SYDNEY NSW 2001



15 October 2013

Dear Director,

**RE: SSD 5156 Rocky Hill Project - Economic impact on the Tourism Sector.**

I represent a group of tourism operators in the Gloucester valley region who conduct their business within the same valley as the proposed Rocky Hill open-cut coal mine. **We object most strongly** to the proposed Project for the reasons set out below.

The overall reason is simple and economic: that the operations of a short-term unsustainable sector of our local economy should not put at risk the entire economic contributions of a long-term sustainable sector operating within the same valley.

**About Gloucester and its Brand**

In marketing terms Gloucester has an unbeatable brand positioning of being the closest town to Barrington Tops (our tourism slogan is 'Basecamp for Barrington Tops'). This unique selling proposition is immensely strengthened by the World Heritage listing of this national park. On top of this world-recognised accolade, the Vale of Gloucester has been listed by the National Trust since 1975, a declared 'significant heritage landscape.' The Vale of Gloucester stretches from Stroud in the south, to Barrington in the north of Gloucester. Our logo is a platypus, which represents healthy rivers and river catchments.

So tourism in Gloucester is inextricably linked to the scenic beauty of peaceful rural valleys and forested mountain tops, and to World Heritage nature for adventure and wellbeing. Gloucester's scenic beauty is not an unsubstantiated claim, rather it's an essential part of Gloucester's Brand.

**Tourism's economic contribution**

Tourism is one of the critical economic drivers for the Gloucester region, specifically listed in our Community Strategic Plan as a key opportunity for the next 10 years in achieving long-term financial sustainability for our region.<sup>1</sup> Proof is in the data from Tourism Research Australia published by Destination NSW that shows our Visitor Economy is worth **\$30 million each year** for the Gloucester local government area<sup>2</sup>. Over the same 21 year life of the Rocky Hill open-cut coal mine, that's a \$630 million contribution! And all of it is earned, retained and churned back into the local economy by small scale tourism operators who create jobs for 241 people in the local industry.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile the Rocky Hill Project claims the local economic benefits of their open-cut mine will be \$250 million over the life of the mine<sup>4</sup> which is of course unsubstantiated and grossly overstated according to other economists. But even if it were true, does this amount justify putting at risk the \$630 million generated by another sector over the same time horizon? *Tourism Advancing Gloucester* believes no it doesn't, definitely not.

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<sup>1</sup> Gloucester Shire Council Community Strategic Plan 2012-2022: Direction Three: Creating a strong economy, pp 39-41

<sup>2</sup> Destination NSW: Travel to Gloucester Local Government Area, 4 year average annual to Sep 2011  
[http://www.destinationnsw.com.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/74101/Gloucester-LGA-profile.pdf](http://www.destinationnsw.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/74101/Gloucester-LGA-profile.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Results of survey into Employment in the Gloucester Tourism Industry, by Gloucester Visitor Information Centre, Oct 2012

<sup>4</sup> Rocky Hill Project EIS – Executive Summary, p24

## **The risks to Gloucester's Visitor Economy arise from the following issues:**

### **1. Water security issues**

Mining companies are currently hiding behind the words of "We comply with all Government requirements". Unfortunately those requirements are usually lame and tame. *Tourism Advancing Gloucester* believes that pristine rivers and aquifers are an essential component of Gloucester's Brand. The activity of the Rocky Hill open-cut coal mine threatens this key component, and so threatens our businesses. Dried-up streams from disappearing aquifers and murky mining discharge in our pristine rivers will sink Gloucester tourism faster than a mid-river rock. So we believe there should be a 10km buffer zone to keep mines away from our precious rivers.

### **2. Air quality issues**

There are already many studies on the affects of poor air quality on the health of the most vulnerable community members - children and seniors - of any community located close to mining operations. No-one would dispute the right to enjoy fresh, clean air, especially when located so close to world heritage listed national parks, forests and conservation areas. *Tourism Advancing Gloucester* believes that poor air quality issues arising from the Rocky Hill open-cut coal mine threaten this key component of Gloucester's Brand, and so threatens our businesses. We are nothing like the Hunter Valley, Gloucester's valley is narrow and steep-sided, so our residents and tourism operators have nowhere to hide when it comes to air quality impacts.

Dusty air filled with particulates will impact on our visitor's peaceful enjoyment of the region, with immediate knock-on affect against visitor satisfaction, against word-of-mouth recommendations, against visitor numbers and against the economic contribution of tourism to Gloucester. Visitors from bustling cities and towns come to our region for the fresh air, clean rivers and emerald green scenery they believe can be found year-round in Gloucester. Dry coughs, dusty skin and gritty eyes hardly make for an enjoyable holiday, so every dusty particle inhaled will be echoed by the sound of Gloucester tourism choking. So we believe there should be a buffer zone for dust of 10km from residential areas.

### **3. Noise impact issues**

Heavy mining activity of the Rocky Hill open-cut coal mine is proposed to operate six days a week, 7am to 10pm, with 10pm-4am additionally mentioned in the EIS as being desirable. The proposed earthen mounds will not mitigate all noise impacts. On quiet rural land, any noise travels easily and Gloucester's narrow and steep-sided valley pushes the sounds of heavy machinery to the far corners of the valley. And low frequency noise is now a medically-recognised hazard to physical health and mental health.

*Tourism Advancing Gloucester* believes that the noise impact from the Rocky Hill open-cut coal mine will be detrimental to Gloucester's Brand. As per the comments above for air quality, we are nothing like the Hunter Valley, there is nowhere for anyone to hide when it comes to noise impacts. 21 years of noise will impact on our visitor's peaceful enjoyment of the region, with immediate knock-on affect against visitor satisfaction, against word-of-mouth recommendations, against visitor numbers and against the economic contribution of tourism to Gloucester.

The soothing peace and quiet of our region is what draws visitors and is an essential component of our Brand. The constant rumbling of heavy mining machinery is not conducive to a relaxed holiday, so every decibel heard is a scream against Gloucester tourism. So we believe there should be a buffer zone for noise of 10km.

### **4. Visual impact issues**

You'd think that this is a no-brainer: an open-cut coal mine in a scenic narrow valley, on land zoned Environmental and Scenic Protection. So what's Rocky Hill's solution to ruining the view? Build some mounds and plant a screen of trees from all vantage points to hide the spoiled view! Hide it eventually that is, because for the next 21 years we've been asked to get used to the interim ugliness. Again, we are nothing like the Hunter Valley where great swathes of open-cut mining operations on a wide flat-

bottomed valley can be simply hidden by a screen of trees and earthen mounds alongside the roadways. Unfortunately, Rocky Hill wants to treat the Gloucester Visitor Economy with this standard cookie-cutter approach.

From all that I have stated prior, it seems almost unnecessary to say: *Tourism Advancing Gloucester* believes that the visual impact from the Rocky Hill open-cut coal mine will not be mitigated by their earthen mounds and so the mining activities will be detrimental to Gloucester's Brand. The tree screens already being planted by Rocky Hill along the Bucketts Way are just a further insult to residents and visitors.

### Our plea

Much has been made of Rocky Hill's unsubstantiated economic claims of their open-cut mining operations that will be so close to Gloucester residences. *Tourism Advancing Gloucester* believes that the true indicator of economic value to our region is from sustainable, long-term contributions to the Gloucester economy. Mining is not sustainable in any sense of the word, as mining companies simply dig it up until it's all gone, then they move on. What will happen to Gloucester in 21 years time when the Rocky Hill open-cut coal mine has finished its extractions and all that remains is a one-industry town justifiably worried about its future?

The NSW town of Kandos recently lost its one big employer – the cement factory. No doubt it was the town's saviour when it opened in 1914, but it seems it wasn't sustainable and now Kandos is cactus. So in just 21 years time, which NSW Government department will set aside some of their diminishing budgets to bail out a sad Gloucester that's been all mined out?

The current plans by the Rocky Hill open-cut coal mine will destroy productive farmlands, ruin our pristine rivers, and provide 21 years of noise, dust and visual impacts. It will poke the eye out of Gloucester's scenic beauty and change forever the scenic rural perception of the region. It will break the Gloucester Brand and deliver a dead tourism industry. But who will then contribute millions of dollars in transitional support for a town about to die? Not the mining companies.

I urge you to reject the Rocky Hill Project in its current form and insist on 10km buffer zones....

- It is **too close** to our community.
- It is **too risky** for our community's health.
- It is **too threatening** to our Visitor Economy which provides a sustainable economic contribution of over \$30 million each year, into perpetuity.

I have made no reportable political donations.

Sincerely,

*Thomas Davey*

Thomas Davey  
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**Mission Statement for Tourism Advancing Gloucester:**  
*Harnessing the strength of the Visitor Economy to  
sustainably grow all small businesses in Gloucester.*

