

Rod and Robin BESIER
'Avonview'
7 Forbesdale Close
FORBESDALE N.S.W. 2422



Phone/Fax: (02) 6558 9883
Email: r.besier@bigpond.com

Welcome to Gloucester at the foothills of the Barringtons

Mrs Robin Besier
7 Forbesdale Close
FORBESDALE NSW 2422
23 October 2013

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

Dear Sir

ROCKY HILL COAL PROJECT – DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION SSD-5156

I strongly oppose the proposed Rocky Hill open cut coal mine at Forbesdale.

It is almost five years since Mr Ian MacDonald assured us that Gloucester Resources Ltd was 'only exploring'. We constantly wrote to the then Labor Government, many Ministers and Departmental staff, that exploring leads to mining. We wrote to the State Opposition and to our Local Member who seemed to be compassionate and appeared to agree with the Gloucester community, that it was impossible to believe that a mine so close to the town could ever be contemplated.

The community has worked tirelessly since then to point out to both NSW Governments that this mine will not provide the revenue to Gloucester or the jobs it promises or return the land to almost its original state, as claimed. GRL has the nerve to say the mine area is not 'prime' agricultural land, therefore in their minds it is rubbish land and only best served by extracting the coal beneath it. This land has provided food, jobs, income and beauty for generations past and it will continue to do so for generations to come, if it is protected.

I ask the Department of Planning & Infrastructure to look closely at Gloucester Council, GRIP and FRAG submissions for a more detailed argument against this mine proposal. Some points to ponder when assessing this project:

- How can a 'small modern mine' which will only produce 25 million tonnes per annum 'for approximately 14 years' (GRL's declaration) be profitable without further expansion?
- Spending \$150 million dollars on widening of roads, bridges, mining infrastructure which includes approx. 3kms of an elevated partially covered overland coal conveyor over a flood plain and still make a profit within a couple of years.
- Excavation below Bucketts Way road level of a rail loop which will include extensive removal by truck of thousands of tonnes of soil.
- An unusual design and very expensive excavation of cuttings for the coal Rail Load-out facility, which has not been seen anywhere in the world. More expense before making a profit.
- Construction of the visibility/noise barriers which cannot work as they are too steep, thus rendering the project impossible to contain dust and noise, the very essence GRL insist will make this mine dust and noise proof.

It would appear that this mine will need to be expanded and just like Yancoal's Stratford mine, which was approved as a 'boutique' mine for only 15 years but has been 'modified' four times over the last few years; a potential of another 15 years' of operation (to 2030) and has an application to develop

three new pits. The Rocky Hill mine has the potential to expand northward, across the present dairy to within 3kms of the township. Mr Chris Hartcher, just recently approved the renewal of EL6523, (with a reduced area which has protected the golf course, sporting fields and the town itself), for GRL to explore closer to the town on the eastern side.

As the old saying goes, things are crook in Tallarook! How one can imagine that the NSW Government could allow such a destructive mining proposal to occur in the small town of Gloucester (2,500 people), just 6kms south of the township and within 3kms of many rural residential homes and families?

Should the Department of Planning & Infrastructure approve this mine in isolation, it should only approve it for the stated time and under no circumstances give the Rocky Hill Coal Project any avenue to approach the Department in the future for further expansions. This would surely test out the validity of GRL's intention of mining for only 14-16 years and not apply for expansion after expansion, as played out by the Stratford mine's expansions and modifications over the last few years.

To quote two of GRL's senior management team, Mr Grant Polwarth and Mr Bob Corbett, 'there are many mines in the Hunter Valley which have only had a life-span of about 10 years'. What they probably failed to state was they became unviable or were abandoned. Or were they just telling stories to try and gloss over the potential expansion possibilities, so as not to make me more suspicious of their future intentions?

However, they have also stated to other people, that should exploration find further coal within their EL6523, they can see no reason for them not to mine even closer to the town. This last statement sounds like GRL have every intention to expand the mine's operations with the Government's blessing.

BACKGROUND

My husband and I retired to Gloucester just over seven years ago. The rapid rate of encroachment of mining around small villages and towns in NSW in those years is just astounding. Four years ago, we began to follow the approvals of new mines and renewals of many exploration licences in the Gunnedah Plains and Camberwell areas. We could see the rapid progression of the renewal process affecting Gloucester. The previous disgraced Minister for Mining (and Agriculture), Mr Ian MacDonald, was well aware of Gloucester's opposition to the renewal of Gloucester Resources Ltd's EL6523, EL6524 and EL6563, but went ahead and re-issued them in 2006, after Gloucester Coal had previously relinquished them. Gloucester Coal's CEO, Mr Barry Tudor at the time, said they were not interested in mining any closer to the town. It appeared that some mining CEO's felt they had a social conscience and respected the community's wishes and were satisfied to continue to mine in isolated areas only.

However, greed and the need to make money overtook these principles, so the previous State Government and the new mining company (Noble Group), proceeded to look beyond their social licence and again in 2009, Mr MacDonald renewed GRL's three licences as well as granting 'modification' after 'modification' of Stratford and Duralie mines.

So this trend continues. Just a couple of months ago Mr Chris Hartcher, much to our dismay, again approved the renewal of the three exploration licences until 2015. Thus today we are experiencing the terrible disruption of a community which now sees a good economically balanced Region becoming eroded and the vision of protecting our agricultural land for future food production is diminishing each time a mining company applies for 'modification' or expansion of their mining business or another player enters the ring, such as AGL and its coal seam gas project, which has also won approval to fight over the spoils of once was an agricultural community.

A SENSE OF PLACE

The definition of a sense of place can be broad. To quote from a Thesis by Warwick Jordan:

"The existence of a sense of place has also been recognised as a basis for achieving particular ends. Amongst these aims are the maintenance of a responsibility towards nature (Harvey, 1996; Hay, 202a); the positive re-situation of humankind's place within nature (Williams and Stewart, 1998); the continuation or establishment of a desirable social, environmental, and economic relations between

communities and the wider world (Relph, 1967; Harvey, 1996; Hay, 2002a); the amelioration of internal conflicts engendered by rapid or externally-imposed change (Yung et al., 2003; Davenport and Anderson, 2005; Manzo and Perkins, 2006); and the maintenance of place identities in a globalised world (Relph, 1976; Harvey, 1995, 1996; Williams and Stewart, 1998)."

It is hard to explain this 'sense of place' to those within Government; public servants, Ministers and the like. To those who personally have not experienced the loss of a 'sense of place', this term is meaningless. When reading documents such as the Rocky Hill EIS, strange words appear and describe people/residences as receptors, so the people in various Departments reading these documents, become detached and can easily draw conclusions, thus rendering people and places as just dots on a map in a town 'out there somewhere'.

When Justice Prestons brought down his findings in favour of the tiny village of Bulga which became the centre of Rio Tinto's push to encroach on the villagers' 'sense of place', he brought into the equation that people *do* matter. Big business has no place in pushing around those who have done nothing but just be in the way of a callous need to mine everything just 'because they can'. Whose fault is this? It is squarely placed at the Government's feet.

In recent years, for many people who moved to Gloucester to live, the Valley became something precious to protect. The land is productive; the landholders had been here for many generations and many were content to pass on to the next generation their skills, but if that wasn't meant to be, their hope was for new blood to run through the veins of the land and the tradition would be carried on. A number of properties in the Valley were sold to a new generation of smaller cattle producers, some people who took over businesses in town but preferred to live on acreages. There are also the retirees who bought small acreage lifestyle blocks and who spend their time as volunteers helping the community. The Gloucester Region has the highest number of volunteers in NSW.

Somewhere, somehow, things started to go terribly wrong. Within the last 15 years, the insatiable thirst for wealth and great profits became the norm. The philanthropists were taken over by foreign-owned multinationals; all jockeying for positions to make money under the guise it was good for our country and our people. However, much of the perceived 'wealth' goes back overseas.

Government cannot see the long term detrimental legacy this will bring upon future generations. So why is there this growing movement amongst its people, who are rising up and saying that there has to be a better way of looking after our country and our people? Why are ordinary people really worried about the future generations, their children and grandchildren?

Government has lost its 'sense of place'.

My objections to this proposed Rocky Hill mine are:

LOSS OF AGRICULTURAL LAND

Please study Gloucester Council's, GRIP and FRAG's submissions which go in depth about how GRL cannot rehabilitate the land lost after the coal is extracted.

Yancoal Aust Pty Ltd has stated in its latest application for expansion, that it will not be able to fill the final void; rather more realistic than GRL's claims that they will restore it to almost as good as it was before they mined the land! Common sense tells one, if millions of tonnes of coal are extracted, where will GRL find the millions of tonnes to replace the coal? The Dept of Planning & Infrastructure must in its considerations, question in detail how they propose to do this?

NOISE (Section 2)

2.2 Concerns and Issues

The Rocky Hill EIS goes into detail about variance in noise at years 2.5 and 4.25. The remaining villagers of Stratford have for years and years complained about noise but to this day nothing has been done to help move them away or to adequately address this health damaging issue. It is a reality and fact of life, living within a few kilometres of a mine will impact upon people's lives, health and sleep patterns. How can we trust Gloucester Resources Ltd to be any different to Yancoal?

Regardless of noise criteria, how can noise be defined as being acceptable by a number of decibels? It is only the individual who can decide what level is acceptable. It would appear the criteria for the number of decibels is set to City levels where noise is a necessary part of life. In the country, noise travels much further than it would in a residential City street layout. Our experience of noise is virtually none at night. The tolerable noises we find comforting at nights are crickets and the occasional bird chattering or cow mooing – far better than the ‘beeping’ of mining trucks and the low frequency noises made by heavy plant equipment in the pits, along with the noise of dumping coal from the loader into the empty coal trucks. We do not choose to live so close to this type of noise.

For example, several weeks ago one of our neighbours held an 18th birthday party for her daughter. As a courtesy, the young girl wrote to every neighbour stating that there would be music played up until a certain time. The party was 500metres away, only one house between us. In the City it would have been around in the next block, out of site. The music was not loud; however, we could hear and feel the base tones which resonated within the walls of our homes. This is described low frequency noise.

Magnify that a thousand times within the pit of an open cut mine..... This is what the residents of Forbesdale will experience at night.

Another example, just last week workmen were carrying out repairs to the Bucketts Way during the day, again several hundreds of metres from our home. These machines were small graders, bobcats and equipment, but we could still hear the beeping and ‘feel’ the noise within our brick home which is built on a concrete slab.

Just reading the criteria for ‘receptors’ over these years it is considered ‘not discernible by most people’ and goes on to say ‘that the 62 additional receptors predicted to experience noise equal to or within 1dB of the intrusive noise limit, but would not be eligible for any additional mitigation, and would be unable to discern any difference between the noise they experience and that experienced by other receptors recognised as being within the noise management zone (and hence having access to additional mitigation)’.

On whose ‘criteria’ is this based? Just reading several paragraphs in regard to who will or won’t experience an increase in noise, started to give me heart palpitations. This was enough to say to your Department WE DON’T WANT TO LIVE IN FORBESDALE, NEAR THIS MINE if my husband and I have to enter into negotiations for acoustical mitigation as being one of the possible ‘receptors’ affected. This clearly says to me, the mine will have effects on a number of residences, but ours **may not** be one under GRL’s or the State Government’s criteria!

My husband and I will be close to 70 should this mine be approved and we do not expect to put up with this rubbish after all these years, when we have had a choice as to where we want to live and when we wish to leave. We should still have the right to choose to leave and move to another place to live out our lives in peace and quiet, but it appears we will be at the mercy of this mining company who has the audacity to ‘negotiate’ with us if we will be affected by 1dB or two or whatever number your Department has put on a mine as being ‘tolerable’.

HEALTH

Doctors say dangers of coal mining to community ignored: Doctors for the Environment group has claimed coal projects have been allowed to pollute at levels known to compromise health. They released a report in May this year, which said governments were more interested in earning money from the projects than protecting the population. It accused governments across Australia of failing to properly fund environmental regulation and cutting green tape ‘at the instigation of developers’.

The report also claimed people living near coal mines were likely to suffer cardio-respiratory and other diseases and that research on the impacts of the developments was well behind regulation:

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/national/doctors-say-dangers-of-coal-mining-to-community-ignored/story-fnii5v70-1226650222070>

Where does this leave the residents in our rural residential estate in Forbesdale? The average age here is 65, well above Gloucester's average age group of 54. Many older residents already suffer from chest ailments. Many who did not know the state of their lung capacity have undergone lung function testing. This is a baseline study which will be followed up over the next couple of years. Should people's health deteriorate further or living within 3kms of the mine be found to be a reason for their decline in health, going down the path of a Class Action could well be the situation Forbesdale residents may find themselves facing. So much for the benefits Governments receive from the mining company which will have to pay towards treatment of those living close to the mine.

Along with AGL's Gloucester CSG Project, which will see up to 110 gas wells surrounding Forbesdale, we are very concerned about the cumulative impacts on our health. This short film explores the health impacts associated with the massive expansion of coal and unconventional gas in Australia:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eDTv5Q-zFQ&feature=youtu.be>

We don't want to live here and we will be looking for a way of leaving before health problems begin to surface.

TRAFFIC CONDITIONS

GRL's EIS states a number of changes to roads will need to be made along the Bucketts Way, Jacks and Waukivory Roads, which pass Avon River and Thunderbolts Estates. The increase in traffic movements to access the mine site, both light and heavy mining equipment will greatly impact on roads and the residents who live along the designated routes. Again, the health impacts from diesel emissions and safety of those having to put up with heavy and frequent truck movements at all hours of the day and night along presently quiet roads, which are extremely close to these housing estates.

I refer you once again to **Gloucester Council's submission** for a more detailed explanation as to the intolerable affects the traffic will have on residents closer to the township.

BLASTING

Who will be responsible to inspect our homes in the Forbesdale residential estate for cracks prior to commencement of the mine? Our insurance companies do not have any criteria for damage caused by blasting near open cut coal mines and tend to leave it up to the homeowner to deal with the consequences. Does that mean it is our responsibility to ask GRL to pay for pre-mining inspections?

Blasting can be dangerous to health. What protection is there for residents who may happen to work in the garden or be passing in close proximity to the mining area when blasting occurs? All mining employees are covered under the Occupational Health and Safety regulations which are stringent and closely adhered to, but what regulations cover residents who live within 3kms of an open cut mine, 24 hours a day and seven days a week?

PROFITS vs FUTURE

Our whole basis of opposing this mine is not because we just are opposed to coal mining. Over its short lifespan, Australia has received great benefits from its mineral resources and will go on growing and profiting from them. However, we are extremely concerned that our smaller rural regions, like Gloucester will disappear, as the need by Government to continue to dig up as much coal as quickly as possible to ship it overseas to countries that are now starting to look at their future in regard to pollution, food production, population growth, etc. Where is Australia's vision beyond this generation?

This State Government can start with Gloucester. This small region is but a pimple on a pumpkin when it comes to coal mining. The Gloucester Region has more to offer in the decades to come than GRL's Rocky Hill 14-16 year plan, ever can. Gloucester has grown out of necessity. The old timers constantly remind the newcomers how difficult it was then their dairy industry suffered the loss of their dairy factory. Logging in the forests shut down and many residents lost their jobs. The old timers embraced the newcomer, coal.

Over the past 15 years, Gloucester has profited by other light industrial ventures, dairying and beef cattle producing are increasing, tourism is a vital part of this region and growing. In comparison,

coal mining royalties have contributed far less than was expected. In fact, the downturn in the price of coal has resulted in the loss of 60 employees at Stratford and Duralie. AGL say the coal seam gas project if it goes ahead, will only employ 12 people. So Gloucester as an agricultural region has to look beyond these extractive industries, if it wants to survive for many generations to come.

There is an undercurrent of concern amongst some light industrial employers in Gloucester, who employ local apprentices and young people and have stated they will consider leaving Gloucester if this mine is approved. Diversity stands to become less attractive to these people and newcomers with skills and new businesses to offer employment to the local community, will not be attracted to make their home in Gloucester.

Please allow Gloucester to be the judge of its own destiny. Profits from its future will be more beneficial to NSW, than this mine ever will.

CONCLUSION

Serious consideration should be given by the Minister to assess this Rocky Hill Coal Project not in isolation, but as part of the cumulative impacts on the Gloucester township, the residents of the Bucketts Way, Thunderbolts, Avon River and Forbesdale housing estates, as well as the Gloucester Valley by the proposed Yancoal Australia Pty Ltd's Stratford mine extension and AGL's Gloucester Project consisting of 330 coal seam gas wells and an 80klm gas pipeline to Hexham.

We did not retire to Gloucester to overlook an open cut mine or live in a gas field. Our wish is, if we can't sell our house in the real estate market, then if the only way of getting out of Gloucester is to be bought out by the mining company (whichever one will be developing Rocky Hill) at a price comparable to a price asked if a mine was not here or proposed, so be it.

We would ask that should this mine be approved, a condition of consent be that the mining company purchase our house, so we can move away to enjoy what is left of our retirement in a far more peaceful and quiet place.

Yours faithfully



Mrs Robin Besier

I have made no reportable political donations.