

I have not made a reportable political donation

12 October 2016

Director – Resource Assessments
Planning Services
Department of Planning & Environment
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

Rocky Hill Coal Project – Application No SSD-5156
Stratford Coal Extension Project – Application No SSD - 4966 MOD1

I oppose the Rocky Hill Coal Project and Stratford Mine modification.

Reasons for my opposition include, but are not limited to:

- Social impacts
- Loss of visual amenity
- Noise, including the impacts of blasting
- Dust and air quality
- Methane, BTEX, other chemicals
- Health impacts – physical and mental
- Impacts on other industries

My submission from 3 years ago should be considered alongside this submission.

I am a resident of Forbesdale, the residential area to be the most affected by this proposed mine. The mine is too close to me, my family and my neighbours and it should not be allowed in such close proximity to people. While horses and grapevines are protected, people in close proximity to actual and proposed mines are not.

Unfortunately, life happens to people while they are waiting to find out their fate in relation to this mine. In the 3 years since I lodged a submission against Rocky Hill attempt #1 many things have happened to my family, my neighbours and my friends. Life circumstances change, and whilst most people could simply do what they have to do – sell houses, move, be physically and mentally safe and be financially secure - it is not so easy when living for years under the threat of a coal mine.

In the last 3 years in Forbesdale:

- 1 person has died
- 2 people have been diagnosed with terminal illnesses
- 1 has had a worsening of a serious lung condition
- 5 have had serious health issues
- 1 now has mobility issues
- 6 (that I know of) have had mental health issues related to stress from this proposed mine

The quality of life for those who live in Forbesdale has been compromised by this long-standing threat of a coal mine. The only way to ameliorate this situation is to give Forbesdale residents some certainty – mainly that they will be able to do as other people not in this situation can do. Simply sell their homes without financial loss and move.

However I realise that no matter what I write, nothing will change. I live with a personal situation which is stressful in itself and is life changing and an inability to sell my home (or to have to sell it with huge financial loss) on top of that is overwhelming. At a meeting with Dept. Planning representatives I asked the question – where is the empathy, where is the compassion, where is the humanity for people like me?? There was no answer.

I also realise that no matter what I write the mine proponent will counter with “facts” from their paid consultants and what I say will be belittled, just like 3 years ago.

There’s a lot of industry and government spin around mining and I, like many others, have no faith or confidence in either the mine proponent or monitoring bodies to operate an open cut mine which will be approved with “onerous conditions” to “world’s best practice” with the “highest environmental standards” and “rigorous monitoring”. What I do know is that the NSW Government is actively lowering standards, allowing higher exceedances, underfunding compliance bodies and is pursuing mining at any cost, especially if those costs are to be borne by people like me as collateral damage.

The mining company GRL has been ignoring the Forbesdale community and in some maps in the EIS the homes in the Forbesdale area have not even been shown – this is dishonest as it makes to show there will be no people affected by the proximity of the mine.

The mine proponent, GRL, has never contacted or consulted me or my family in relation to the proposed mine and the impact it will have. My property lies about 1.1km from the mine site and will overlook it.

I attended the special meeting of MidCoast Council this afternoon and was heartened to hear that not only does the Council oppose the Rocky Hill mine, the administrator John Turner does as well. To summarise in just a few words what Mr Turner said “This mine is in the wrong place”.

The MidCoast Council in its October 2016 submission states:

• The fundamental concern for Council is that whilst impact management and mitigation might meet State standards, there will be residual impacts which will be felt by many new residences for the first time, if the mine is approved. These residents will be asked to live with those impacts for the entire proposed life of the mine, and potentially beyond.

• It is not in the public’s interest to approve an open cut coal mine in this location due to its proximity to the Gloucester urban township and adjoining rural/rural residential properties.

As a Forbesdale resident, and on behalf of the good people of Forbesdale, I recently applied to be a member of the GRL Exploration CCC. Whilst the pro-mining Chamber of Commerce and the pro-mining lobby group Advance Gloucester were approached by the Chair of the CCC and invited to have a representative become a member of the CCC - my application was refused by the Chair. The view from the outside is that this committee is stacked by those who are in favour of this mine and/or have a vested interest in this mine proceeding.

Of course I oppose the Rocky Hill mine and the Stratford modification, but remain under no illusion that it is likely to be approved and the residents of Forbesdale will bear the burden of that approval, “onerous conditions” notwithstanding. In that case, it MUST be a condition of consent that the homes in Forbesdale are placed in an acquisition zone.

The dust, the noise, the blasting, the loss of visual amenity, the impacts to health will be too great. The mental health impacts alone during the last 4 years as GRL has been pushing on with this mine have been too great.

Some of the other reasons why this mine should NOT be approved include: health impacts on the greater Gloucester population; the clean green image of the town and the impact of the loss of tourism; the potential for damage to air and water; the absolute loss of the visual beauty of the area; the impact on agriculture; the fact that mining is not a sustainable industry and it will not “save” Gloucester despite pro-mining claims.

I’m sure other submissions will elaborate on many of these points, better than I could, and I fully support those submissions.

The highly unusual inversion layer which the Gloucester Valley experiences 40% of the time will have negative consequences in relation to the trapping of dust and vehicle emissions, as well as the amplification of noise.

Even with this proposed coal mine, Gloucester’s coarse particle (PM10) concentrations already exceed the national standard of 50µg/m³ at the Waukivory Road and Fairbairns Road (Table 4.20, p.4-69). The EIS attributes these exceedances to bushfire. This may be the case however bush fires are not something which can be readily prevented or controlled (and even GRL does burning off on its own land), so in locations which already experience high concentrations of PM10 it is essential to regulate polluters such as coal mines. Additionally, the national standard for 24 hour average PM2.5 concentrations has been exceeded six times at Jacks Road and seven times at Fairbairns Road during the last 5 years.

Of course, small particles such as PM2.5 can be inhaled deep into the lungs causing serious health issues. Particle pollution contributes to the premature deaths of 3,000 Australians each year. It has only been in the past day or so that it has been reported that the current resurgence of Black Lung in Australia is not confined to underground mining but also affects those who work in open cut mines. Mining staff are afforded medical checks (which are not always sufficient given the Black Lung diagnoses) whilst those who are forced to live near coal mines, and have many more hours of dust exposure, are provided with nothing.

For Gloucester there will be no dust monitoring network with real time SMS alerts, as in the Hunter, nor does there appear to be any concern about noxious clouds from blasts-gone-wrong.

Of concern also is the amount of methane which may escape into the environment as the coal is mined. Whilst exploring for CSG the company AGL believed that the Gloucester valley could be the second biggest source of methane (CSG) in NSW. While GRL does not intend to mine below about 120 metres, it will be disturbing the coal seams while it cherry picks the best coal and leaves the rest behind. The impact of blasting may not be known and avenues for methane to vent to the surface may be created. Additionally, the BTEX chemicals which caused concern for AGL were naturally occurring in the coal seams – what consideration has GRL given for dealing with these dangerous chemicals?

What has also not been considered is the possibility that the coal seams could ignite – we know that burning coal created huge impacts at Hazelwood with increased deaths because of the pollution and would not like to see that scenario in our enclosed valley.

The addition by GRL of a reverse osmosis (desalination) plant does not address the dissolved metals in the water which will subsequently end up being irrigated onto pasture. AGL had problems with build-up of heavy metals in its irrigation “trials” which led to the irrigation being suspended. Grazing cattle consume up to 50kg of soil along with the grass and this raises concern about food safety if there are heavy metals in the soil because of irrigation with waste water.

The offsets for this mine are not sufficient, especially in relation to the creeks.

In the Australian Journal of Rural Health (Vol 24, Issue 4, August 2016) is a paper entitled:
“Examining health and well-being outcomes associated with mining activities in rural communities of high-income countries: a systematic review”.

The article abstract contains the following:

Results

Evidence of increased prevalence of chronic diseases and poor self-reported health status was reported in mining communities. Relationship breakdown and poor family health, lack of social connectedness and decreased access to health services were also reported. Changes to the physical landscape; risky health behaviours; shift work of partners in the mine industry; social isolation and cyclical nature of “boom and bust” activity contributed to poorer outcomes in communities.

I think that speaks for itself.

Anyway, along with my neighbours, I will wait and see if any compassion, empathy or humanity comes our way.

Yours sincerely,

Name withheld