

MID-COAST COUNCIL

ADMINISTRATOR'S MINUTE

I accept the reports and recommendation prepared by Mid-Coast Council officers in regard to an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Rocky Hill Coal Mine near Gloucester and the proposal to modify the development consent of the Stratford Mine to receive extracted coal from the Rocky Hill Coal Mine should it proceed.

Mid-Coast Council is not the deciding authority for this matter. The NSW State Government is the ultimate deciding authority.

Mid-Coast Council is a stakeholder in the process, the same as others who are entitled to have prepared submissions to the Department of Planning. Mid-Coast Council's position in the process, despite what some might believe or utter, is no stronger than any other person or organisation in relation to their submission.

In the case of this submission, Council Officers of Mid-Coast Council have prepared a technical submission in a wholly professional manner, taking into account, as they are required, the planning laws of NSW and the consideration of the application of those laws against this proposal. I congratulate them on their professionalism.

The method which has been applied to assessing this application by the Officers of Mid-Coast Council, on strict planning guidelines, is the correct method of considering this issue. Emotional, philosophical or personal views without relevance to the planning provisions upon which this matter will be ultimately decided are understandable, but such submissions do not have the status as those which adhere to planning laws. As I have said, this matter will be decided upon by the State Government (with perhaps some Federal input) on planning premises and, as such, a submission formed on addressing the planning issues is a must.

In addition to the Council report, I wish to make some basic lay person, objective comments about the project. The following comments are not as specialised as those contained in the Council's submission, but are based on some of the planning issues which are considered in determining mining applications.

First, I am not anti coal mines. The coal industry is vital to our economy and employs many people, many young people as we have recently seen in South Australia, coal provides a vital essential to our community - electricity.

However, I believe this coal mine proposal is simply in the wrong place.

Having grown up in a coal mine community, with a coal mine some 600 metres from my home, another about the same distance from my primary school, and hearing the tunnelling from those mines under our home, I know first-hand what proximity means.

This mining proposal is simply too close to residential areas. In rural NSW new coal mines are mainly located in areas out of towns and villages. They are often in areas where there are large agricultural holdings. In those areas the zone of affectation for mines is up to two kilometres, often only a few landholders are in this zone of affectation.

In the case of the Rocky Hill Mine proposal there are substantial residential areas within a kilometre in one direction and in another direction within 1.8 kilometres, with the town of Gloucester five kilometres away.

The disruption to these established residential areas would be more than substantial. They would be constantly affected by the operations of any mine located where this mine is planned.

In relation to lighting, no matter what baffles are attempted on the proposed mines lighting, there will be a substantial escape of light which will create a constant hue on the night sky which will create an aura, I suspect an orange aura, observable over a large part of Gloucester town and surrounding areas.

Coal mines produce noise, not just from blasting, which I might add is not as substantial as some may think, but a constant background noise of machinery operations and general operations of a coal mine. The noise, in my experience, manifests itself as a hum or a surf-like sound. The mine noise (which is acknowledged by the industry to exist) is more evident in the night, but it is there subliminally at all times. I know the applicants have noted they will limit mining operations in the evenings but I have some more comments shortly in that regard.

The proposed mine, if it proceeds, will be under strict conditions as pertains to dust emissions from the site. Nevertheless, dust is an inescapable factor in coal mining. Again with residences within one kilometre and the centre of the town of Gloucester only some five kilometres away, it is inevitable there will be dust episodes.

As a side issue to the dust factor, should there be a blast plume episode and depending on the plume level, the residents of the areas close to the mine may suffer a significant health and/or environmental event.

The proposal, if it proceeds, will inhibit further land release areas vital for Gloucester's growth and prosperity.

The mine's boundaries to the north and west press onto the existing residential areas. Therefore, from an existing infrastructure in the established residential areas, it would be predictable that expansion of reasonably costed residential areas would flow-on. This will not be able to occur for at least as long as any mine is present, at least now 20 years and any extension time and rehabilitation period thereafter.

Also, as an aside, looking at the future of the area after mining has concluded, I have to ask how, as the applicants have stated, there will be no void.

I also have concerns about water discharge and the possibility of discharge into the waterways surrounding the proposed mine site. I note Mid-Coast Water has, as has Mid-Coast Council, made a submission on this matter addressing the statutory issues of water, water containment, water discharge and other relevant matters.

Finally, I note that the operators have said they will limit the hours of operation for the proposed mine from 7.00am to 6.00pm for the first three years and 7.00am to 10.00pm thereafter. At a future time on any number of grounds, it is relatively easy to seek a modification of a planning approval to extend the operation time of a mine which, if granted, would exacerbate the issues of light, noise and dust.

So, as I said, these are observations I have made, not on a philosophical basis, not on an emotional basis, but on what I hope will be taken as an objective basis from some insight into the mining industry and the planning issues under which they operate.

Perhaps, if this mine was in another location, many of the concerns I have raised would not come into play and, perhaps, I would have a different view, but that is not the case here.

If approved the proposed mine is to me, for reasons mentioned above, located in the wrong place.

I intend to attach these observations to the Council submission.

John Turner
Mid-Coast Council Administrator

12 October 2016