

# **Julie Lyford - Personal Submission against the Rocky Hill (GRL) Coal Mine Proposal - Application No SSD-5156**

12<sup>th</sup> October 2016

As a resident of Gloucester for just over 30 years and a former Mayor and councillor, I am totally opposed to an open cut coal mine being excavated next door to the township of Gloucester.

The detailed submission by Gloucester Shire Council in 2013 still retains many of the reasons as to why this mine is unacceptable. Indeed, Midcoast Council's submission as tabled at the Gloucester Chambers today was a much awaited document and I am delighted that the Administrator, John Turner, supported the opposition to the GRL proposal.

Rather than duplicate the details of both submissions, I am in agreement with and support the opposition to the proposal and the many issues contained within.

Further, as Chair of Groundswell Gloucester (GG), I fully support the contents of the GG group submission. An immense amount of voluntary community work (thousands of hours) has once again detailed why proposals such as this should not be acceptable to the Department of Planning.

The noise, dust, close proximity, risk to water and health, total lack of social licence and community acceptance are just the tip of the iceberg.

However, as this is my personal submission I would like to outline my thoughts around poor and complicit processes, the history of the Gloucester mining issues and the need for structural and attitudinal change in government departments.

Over the last 15 years, I and countless others have met with many Ministers and departmental officers, their staff and others within the political systems of government.

A government document written in 1994, "Effects of Land Use on Coal Resources", outlining how mining is/was threatened by agriculture and national parks (!), appears to many the beginning of the disproportionate power of the mining industry and the growing disempowerment of communities across the Hunter and beyond.

The stealth of the Mining Act, gradually becoming the overarching legislation, has devastated many communities who feel ignored and worthless within the government decision making processes. The fact that many ordinary citizens have become reluctant activists, (and who have been maligned by government and industry for standing up to protect their places), against an industry that dominates the planning processes amongst others – has left deep issues of mistrust, mental health problems and loss and grief. Add the classic divide and conquer behaviour of resource extraction companies (we have documented evidence and statements to police in Gloucester due to this devastating social disruption) and you have our community left with a grave sense of injustice along with a total mistrust of government and the lack of any fairness. Enough is enough.

When will anyone in the departments have the courage to acknowledge that the planning process is not only flawed, but has taken us backward in the protection of people and the environments they

rely on? Why do we have to go through this over and over again, putting in submissions, trying to get some sense of how government processes (or lack of integrity of processes) fits together?

And then to find out that there is a revolving door of politicians and staffers who come and go (and still are!) from resources industry companies/advocacy groups and government? That even when communities win through the courts the government enables change of legislation so the mining can continue? This behaviour destroys any confidence that government is for the people.

Not only have resource extraction companies lost their social licences (most never had them in the first place), so have the departments and government agencies who have morphed over the years to enable the blanket acceptance of any mine, anywhere, with communities as collateral damage.

We have documents by the box load regarding GRL, Stratford mine, AGL, government departments and ministers - files that have grown over the many years we have been fighting to save the beautiful Gloucester valley. There is already a deep sense of shock and dismay within the Gloucester and Manning communities that we have to fight the complicit and adverse behaviour of the companies and government yet again.

When Gloucester's story is fully told, there will be astonishment that in such enlightened times people have had to fight so hard, putting their lives on hold, just to save their homes, environments, water supplies and the integrity of the places they love.

For the NSW State Government to continue to inflict the stress, uncertainty, risks and community division caused by rampant coal exploration and production licences is unconscionable.

This proposal by GRL, or any other extraction company, to even contemplate the type of destruction this mine would bring is totally unacceptable.

The Gloucester community is tired. Its social structures have been turned upside down and we have endured threats, bullying, smear campaigns and unpleasant social encounters from those few who see the money as the sole reason to have this mine.

We know now that this is part of the 'community engagement' process that so many residents of other towns, who have endured similar issues, warned us about. We have documented these problems over the years. How they engage the local Chambers of Commerce is enlightening, along with the emergence of new community groups who not only support the companies but somehow the full support of government agencies at their meetings. People know what is going on.

The AGL Gas Field Project was our introduction to how the industry and government work hand in glove to enable the companies to get their approvals. This is despite communities in good faith trying to get the same acceptance to meet with the same departments to highlight the fundamental issues as to why certain places should be off limits to coal and gas extraction.

I write this submission as someone who has, from 1995 until 2012, experienced the politics of Local Government, the RDA Hunter board as a member for 5 years and countless meetings with Ministers and departmental staff. To say that I have totally lost faith in the decision-making processes with regard to mining and coal seam gas, along with the skewed planning processes, is an understatement.

The majority of people in affected communities feel devastated that they can no longer believe in the justice and impartiality of governments to protect their places and wellbeing.

The mental anguish is visible, people cannot sell their houses or farms or they lose substantial value on their homes. The fractured social and family relationships have led to robbing the community of its positive cultural energy.

I implore the department of planning, Premier Baird and the decision makers regarding the Rocky Hill proposal and the Stratford extension to reject the applications. Furthermore, it is vital that we do not go through this ever again. When will government have the courage to turn the unjust, destructive and overarching Mining Act on its head and bring some relief to the communities of NSW?

Lastly but not least, climate change and the destructive future for the planet of 1.5 – 2 degrees warming and the resulting global problems means that there should be no new coal mine approvals.

Communities know that renewables are the way forward and cheaper in the long run.

There is also the issue of culpability – knowingly causing harm. The facts are there. This mine is unacceptable. The risks of culpability sit with the decision makers.

The GRL Rocky Hill Coal mine proposal must be rejected. The exploration licences (currently expired!) cannot be reissued. The government cannot keep knowingly destroy Aboriginal heritage, biodiversity, habitat and the aesthetic beauty of the Gloucester valley.

The Gloucester community must have assurances that we can move on to a liveable, sustainable future, free from the threats of unsustainable resource extraction.

After 20 years of uncertainty and unfair stress, Gloucester needs your protection.

Kind regards

Julie Lyford OAM



2 Queen Street

Gloucester

NSW

2422

I have not made a reportable political donation.

I am happy for my details to appear on the departments website.

T