

Mandalong Southern Extension Project SSD5144

Submission from Leonie Sweeney PO Box 288 Morisset NSW 2264

Introduction

I am the owner/ occupier of 42 Mandaluck Chase, Mandalong.

My property has not been, and will not be, affected by mining activity, although the original subsidence predictions caused the Mine Subsidence Board to effectively disallow an extension to our small 2 bedroom house. It has taken over ten years to have the MSB's building restriction on our property overruled.

I have been secretary of the Mandalong Community Association and a member of the CCC since 2011.

In these positions I have come to understand and appreciate the very real effects of the stress mining has had, and continues to have, on our community.

As a local resident I have experienced the decimation of our community through the purchase of over 40 properties by Centennial Coal.

As such, it was the Social Impact Assessment that I went to first in my reading of the Mandalong Southern Extension EIS. I was disappointed to find neither of these issues, regarded as serious concerns in the community had been, in our opinion, acknowledged or adequately addressed by the consultant.

My submission attempts to fill this gap and outline our plan to redress the situation our community finds itself in.

Our community experience

Our community is rural and our population small, just 417 in the 2006 census and down to 388 in the 2011 census.

Our community demonstrated great cohesion and strength when it exposed the deficiencies of the 2005 Mandalong xxx EIS and raised the funds required to take the NSW Government and its coalminer PowerCoal to court. Their actions forced the parties to honour the requirements of the original terms of approval and eventually the disputed flood study was undertaken.

However the stresses took their toll on residents and many felt they had no option but to sell up and leave. In a conversation I had with one such resident she admitted she was so traumatised by having to move from the valley that she did not unpack her personal belongings for a year. These people are not the subject of any social impact survey. In that sense they are gone and forgotten.

Many of the remaining families are currently facing the stress of undermining and many more will with the Southern Extension. Some families do deal with the stress well but others have a difficult time of it. Unfortunately the Social Impact Assessment seems, in our opinion, to have trivialised the issue. It is variously described: at worst "a degree of angst" and "adverse community reaction" page 36 and at best "Undermining will generally result in concerns by all residents who are affected by the

mine. This impact will be ongoing for the life of the mine and concerns / fears heightened when undermining is imminent.” page 25

One of the factors that cause the stress to be compounded is the unavoidable time it takes from the EIS to the actual undermining and resultant effects. Just when people need to be strong in order to deal with the aftermath of the undermining they find themselves emotionally exhausted and depleted. Mental health issues are a very real concern.

The MCA recognises that these families need a strong cohesive community to help them through the experience.

In recent years Centennial Coal has purchased more than 40 of the approximately 130 properties in the Mandalong Valley.

Typical of rural locations, Mandalong families had lived in the valley for many years and there was a strong sense of community and appreciation and protection of the local environment.

The social profile of the community has radically changed as long-term owner residents have been replaced with Centennial tenants. The social cohesion of the community has been adversely affected. The impact has been significant.

This unavoidable sequence of events has fractured and weakened our community engagement and it will be with us for many years to come. Centennial has commenced reselling its properties however the process, of necessity, will be gradual and could take a decade or more.

Rebuilding the Mandalong Community- a shared responsibility

The MCA recognises the situation the community now finds itself in and understands that, as we face another 20 years of mining in our area, it is critical that we rebuild a community that again is robust with a strong sense of identity and pride in the area.

A strong cohesive community will be better placed to support those families facing the stresses of undermining.

The MCA has set about an intense period of community-building activities and designed projects that will draw together and nourish the rebuilding of the Mandalong community. Many of the projects the MCA is funding independently and for others it has been seeking involvement and assistance from Centennial.

MCA sponsored activities include regular community social events including a Book Club and Film Club. In addition, a Mandalong web site has been constructed which has facilitated the organisation of community events.

Two other MCA initiatives are currently with LMCC for review.

The first proposal is the creation and build of an Entry Statement Artwork that will provide an attractive and unique entrance to our area.

The second proposal is the beautification of the existing LMCC Reserve on Old Maitland Road, designed to help address issues around the illegal dumping of rubbish and providing a safe and attractive stop and meeting area for visitors to the area.

The plan for the creation and build of the Entry Statement Artwork and the beautification of the Reserve is for the processes to be undertaken in a way that involves the whole community.

Funding for the projects will be sought from relevant organisations offering grants for such projects. The projects will be managed by award winning local artist and Community Cultural Development strategist Margrete Erling.

Approximately five years ago the MCA commenced discussions with senior Centennial staff with a view to the company gifting the Mandalong community a significant and lasting benefit. The MCA had surveyed the Mandalong residents and a park and community centre/hall were highly favoured. (The only amenity in the area is an old fire shed barely big enough for the fire truck.) Discussions continued and Centennial put forward a choice of three sites from which residents made their selection. As Centennial was encouraging about the proposal the MCA met with the LMCC Lord Mayor and a proposal was developed for discussion. Architects, recommended by Centennial's Social Impact consultant, were invited to give proposals for the development of schematic plans. However about two years ago the process stalled, responses from Centennial slowed and the requested funding for the schematic planning phase has been held up for some 18 months.

See the Submission from the MCA written by our executive team for the Mandalong Community Park proposal.

During this period the MCA identified several other projects that would be beneficial to the community and provide Centennial the opportunity to contribute in a positive way. These proposals are detailed in the MCA Submission.

Centennial as a responsible corporate citizen

There is a strong belief in the community that Centennial needs to be involved in assisting the community in its rebuilding efforts. Provision of land for the proposed park and funding over a period of several years to build the hall and facilities would not only provide the residents with the ideal facility to bring the community together, it would also position centennial in a more positive light.

For the past sixteen years our community has been occupied with issues that have a negative influence in their lives. We face that for another 20 years.

Our aim in building the park is to embark on a project that will have a positive influence on the lives of Mandalong residents.

Whilst individual residents directly affected by mining activity are receiving a range of compensations, it is the community overall which has suffered significant social affects. To date there has been no compensatory consideration given to the Mandalong community.

Approximately a year ago the MCA became aware of the VPA process and brought it to the attention of Centennial Mandalong management through the last CCC meeting of 2012.

At first it was thought that a VPA would allow Centennial to fund the projects to help rebuild the Mandalong community however attempts via the CCC to extract a commitment from Centennial to support the local residents have met with resistance.

The Social Impact Assessment included in the EIS makes two brief references to a VPA found on pages 5 and 28

It is disturbing to the MCA and the residents of Mandalong that the EIS document makes no mention of any specific benefits, on any measure including employment at the mine, for the residents of the

valley. We read that the surrounding regions will benefit, the State of NSW will benefit and Centennial will benefit. However there is not one comment to support the request that the residents of Mandalong itself who need to rebuild their once vibrant community will benefit or be supported in any way.

Centennial will be mining in our community for another 20 years.

We read in the Social Impact Statement page 6

“Mandalong Mine represents a major component to the success of Centennial, producing approximately 30 percent of the company’s annual ROM coal.”

We understand that the Southern Extension Project will yield high quality coal and will be profitable.

Summary

In my opinion the Social Impact Assessment largely ignores the two most concerning social impacts being experienced by the residents of Mandalong:

- 1) High levels of stress over long periods of time.
- 2) The impact of a community decimated by the rapid change in its demographic due to the purchase of approx. 40 properties by Centennial.

The MCA recognises that families dealing with the stress of undermining need a strong cohesive community to help them through the experience

The Social Impact Assessment describes the benefactors of the Centennial Project but makes no mention of any benefit to the residents of Mandalong .

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