

4th April 2017
The Minister for Planning
Department of Planning & Environment
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

Brandy Hill Quarry Expansion

Dear Minister

I am opposed to the expansion of the Hanson Quarry at Brandy Hill for a number of reasons. Most of these are clearly outlined in the submission made by Brandy Hill/Seaham Action.

My submission, however, deals with a personal health issue; one that can be played out in various forms by any member of the community. It deals with health and amenity and according to the SEARS IS TO BE TAKEN AS SERIOUSLY AS ANY OTHER ISSUE.

In 1986 my husband and I bought a block of land on Brandy Hill Drive and moved into our new house in 1990. At that time we were aware of the quarry, the output of about 100,000 tonnes/annum, the number of trucks at about 17/day and the life of the quarry was about 30 years.

We had 2 young children and we thought the semi-rural lifestyle, no nearby industry to destroy the ambience and healthy country air was ideal.

We regularly took our children on bike rides along Brandy Hill Drive and walked to visit new neighbours. The children caught the school bus to Seaham Primary School and we became part of a wider community. At no time did we feel a sense of danger for ourselves or our children.

Truck traffic was minimal with noise generated considered acceptable because of the low numbers.

Work hours were 6am to 6pm and truck movements were even less on Saturdays.

So, yes, the residents INITIALLY lived harmoniously with the quarry.

Without consultation with local residents, new owners had been given new operating licences by the consenting authority, Port Stephens Council (PSC). Tonnage was increased to 400,000 tonnes/annum and then to 700,000 tonnes/annum. With each increase the contracts the companies won grew larger, the roads deteriorated at a much faster rate leading to empty truck noise increasing and creating dangerous situations for road users including children, horse riders, bike riders and drivers swerving to miss potholes.

I approached PSC on numerous occasions asking for better road edges to walk on, better and more frequent mowing, to fix the potholes along my frontage and to fast track a pathway. Each time I was told that levies paid by the quarry were used on road maintenance alone. Other residents lobbied for better bus stops and new location for a major one right at the T-intersection of Brandy Hill Drive and Seaham Road. It is of interest that after the bus stop was relocated a truck (not a quarry truck) travelling down to that intersection had brake failure and drove straight through where about 20 children would have been standing. Proof that these incidents can and do occur.

The quarry was contacted to voice concerns about the number of trucks and the noise - engine braking - was a great concern.

Then came a tipping point; in 2014 when Daracon started sending trucks down Brandy Hill Drive and onto Seaham Road in conjunction with Hanson's equally large contracts and we had a taste of what more than 500 trucks/day was like.

And then to be informed that both Quarries wanted to expand and quarry 1.5 million tonnes seemed insanity!

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

In 2003 I witnessed an horrific car accident on Clarencetown Road. My car was involved to a minor degree in the confusion that followed. The noise of the Westpac emergency helicopters, emergency vehicle sirens and police left me quite traumatised and resulted in PTSD / anxiety.

I was eventually referred to a Psychiatrist/anxiety expert as well as a psychologist.

Apart from medication here were the strategies suggested for me to be able to live my life again.

1. Walk as often as possible.
2. Find a calm area - in my case, my garden, and immerse yourself in that activity. The strategy is called mindfulness.
3. Deep breathing exercises.
4. Good sleep patterns.

These strategies were working well as I walked about 10,000 steps twice per day; once with a friend in the morning and then in the evening with my husband, often by head-torch light. My garden became my refuge and my anxiety was reduced.

But now, none of that is possible. Walking has become so dangerous with the number of trucks constantly high and gardening is no longer pleasurable due to ongoing truck noise.

Sleep is disturbed sometimes from as early as 3.30am with empty trucks going to Martins Creek quarry and full trucks from Hanson from as early as 5.30am. Studies show that quality of sleep is essential to good brain function.

THE VOLUME OF AND NOISE ASSOCIATED WITH QUARRY TRUCK MOVEMENTS IS CAUSING ME GREAT DISTRESS.

In 1983 5 members of the Seaham community on Wighton Street complained that one truck every 10 minutes and a dangerous intersection with Seaham Road was too much to bear. And their argument was considered plausible.

So why in 2017 should we tolerate over 844 or even 584 truck movements from Hanson (depending on which part of Hanson's EIS you read) plus 200/day from Martins Creek? Day and night!

I am one individual within a whole community. There are many stories not so far removed from mine. You can't see stress and anxiety like you can see a broken arm but it is just as real.

These stories...my story is important and I would like it to be taken seriously when the proposed expansion is assessed.

I have sent a confidential supporting letter from my specialist to the department of planning.