

30 June 2017

Executive Director Resource Assessments
Department of Planning and Environment
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

SUBMISSION TO HUME COAL PROJECT (7172) AND BERRIMA RAIL PROJECT (7171)

I refer to the Department's invitation for submissions to the above Environmental Impact Statement. I write to express my opposition to both Projects.

I am the owner of Exeter General Store, a destination café, foodstore and licensed post office located in the village of Exeter, NSW. I have operated this business for the past nine years with my wife, growing the business over this time to currently employ over 20 local people. We have been residents of Exeter for this same time.

Our business serves several hundred guests daily, both local Exeter residents and visitors to the Southern Highlands. Critical to our ongoing success is the unique rural village character of Exeter and the well preserved natural environment of the Southern Highlands region.

I frequently speak with guests who tell me they are drawn to Exeter and the Southern Highlands because of its uncorrupted landscapes, sensitive development clusters, and clean air. They make the effort to travel, and sometimes relocate, to the area oftentimes because they are seeking this pristine environment that does not exist in cities. Personally, my wife and I settled in the area to raise a family for these reasons also, after relocating from a major city.

It is easy for some to misunderstand opposition to the projects as simply anti-coal or anti-development philosophies. Whilst coal will, and should, have a much more limited role in Australia's future energy mix, it has of course contributed to the economy at both a state and national level, and has been a major employer in some regional areas. Some project proponents may accordingly seek to polarise the debate in terms of economy versus environment, but nothing could be further from the symbiotic reality.

In assessing the suitability of the Hume Coal and Berrima Rail projects in the Sutton Forest locality, I submit that the NSW Government must first consider how it leverages the State's resources to develop a sustainable competitive advantage for the prosperity and wellbeing of the people of NSW and the Commonwealth. To do so, the unique characteristics of various regions across the State must be recognised. If a uniform approach is taken, the State's productive economic assets will deteriorate because these unique regional characteristics are not developed and protected.

The Southern Highlands is unique in its proximity to Sydney and location in the Sydney-Canberra corridor, combined with its heritage and unspoilt rural environment described above. The future economic success of the Southern Highlands, and subsequently its contribution to the NSW economy, lies in large part by maintaining and developing its tourism industry for domestic visitors, leveraging the region's natural beauty and productive agricultural capacity. Such a portfolio approach would provide long-term economic strength and resilience to the region. Conversely, the Hume Coal Project has a much more finite lifespan and will undermine the very characteristics that make the region economically viable in the long term.

Over the past decade, I have witnessed the evolution of the agritourism and food industries across the Southern Highlands. Coordinated efforts have seen farmers, processors, and hospitality venues gaining greater presence in tourism markets to showcase the fresh produce and unspoilt beauty of the region. The Projects would completely undermine the credibility of the Southern Highlands brand, including in emerging premium markets such as destination weddings. The employment generated directly in retail, accommodation, food and flow-on industries would be significantly reduced and in no material way offset by the short-term construction and operational jobs arising from the Projects. As an employer, I am acutely aware of the threat these Projects present.

The Hume Coal and Berrima Rail Projects will compromise groundwater quality and access, damage the visual and physical landscape, generate significant localised air and noise pollution, cause unmitigated traffic congestion. I note the detailed analysis that has been undertaken by and on behalf of Coal Free Southern Highlands Inc detailing these issues, including The Australia Institute's earlier Economic Assessment of the Hume Coal Project. Overall, the Projects present threats of serious and irreversible environmental damage, and the EIS does not provide certainty that such damage can be avoided or appropriately mitigated. As a parent, I hold concerns about the potential health and lifestyle impacts for my children and their future.

The Hume Coal Project and associated Berrima Rail Project would at best provide marginal and only short term economic returns, and to achieve this would seriously and irreversibly damage the natural environment of the Southern Highlands, a critical long-term asset for the people of NSW. Allowing the Projects to proceed would be taking an unnecessary risk when there is a much better economic alternative by developing the region as a tourism destination without mining.

I would be happy to provide further input to the assessment process. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any stage.

Yours sincerely



Craig Johnson
Director

I have not made any reportable political donations