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

This is a submission to the Hume Coal Project SSD 7172

I object to this project and recommend that it be rejected on the following grounds..

Precis..

I run an accommodation business on the Southern Highlands about 15 minutes away from the proposed mine. It is a small, awarded, successful business operating for over 16 years which sees its main draw from weekend weddings and recreational guests utilising us as a quiet base from which to attend events, explore the National Park, State Forests, wineries, historic towns and villages of the area. It is a very special area and seen as the clean, green escape for people from the Sydney, Wollongong and Canberra regions to recreate, away from the noise, pollution, light and concrete of our ever invading, sprawling metropolis'. The feedback from our Sydney guests (about 50% of our draw) is that they prefer the Highlands to the Blue Mountains as a recreational escape, as it easy to access, greener, more agricultural, rural and in much closer proximity in drive time and less traffic in transit than the drive up the Mountain to visit Katoomba. In size, we are not a big region for tourist to traverse - only 30 minutes sees you from one end of the region to the other in any direction. Because of this small geographical size, what happens within the region has a GREAT effect on the whole.

I would like to share some of my experiences of the past six years from a tourism standpoint related to this proposed project and some of my concerns. I apologise, it is a bit rambling, but it does cover a few salient points.

The Environment and Tourism connection..

I have fielded six years of questions from our visitors and guests about the environmental and health impacts of the proposed mine. Some are looking at buying real-estate in the area. They have many in depth questions about the project, land values, suburbs affected, noise potential, traffic potential - doing their due diligence. I also have at least one visitor initiated conversation each weekend about the proposed project- its environmental impact on our area, effect on land values (especially from Sydney guests!), and its tourism impact. Heavy industry is what they are getting away from when coming here. Many inner city guests recognise the yellow signs from the Tempe area coal protests and know what they mean. The constant comment is "what a shame.." One guest addressed the elephant in the room when they came out with this statement! "I hope it doesn't turn into another "Hunter Valley", we don't go there anymore because the mines have spoilt everything - I remember when it was nearly all agricultural land - its now all mines and dust and billowing coal fired electricity plants and you cant see any hills other than the man made ones that block the view to the monster industrial nightmare behind.. And the poor winery owners - gosh it must have had a huge impact on their business from the drop in tourism". Every visitor is worried that it will happen again here, and frankly so am I. The threat of this project irreversibly taints the area in the minds of our guests. Now if a three bedroom establishment that relies on our areas green credentials for its livelihood is fielding these type of questions every weekend from a third of our guests, what effect will the actuality of a dirty, nineteenth century heavy industry have on our tourism industry? Tourism is one of the biggest job providers (both direct and indirect) in the region.

Heritage..

The site of the proposed mine is within two to three kilometres of our regions most treasured historic gems - the best preserved Georgian town in NSW, Berrima - which not only is one of our largest tourist attractions with a massive destination retail sector, but has the main water supply for the region in (the Wingecarribee River) running through it. Also within a 10 km radius, we have about two thirds of the Southern Highlands wineries, olive plantations and many of its equine and bovine properties. As i said earlier, it is a small region. Everything is effected. Tourist flock to the area to taste local product, shop, drive through green rural areas, tastings at the cellar doors of small vineyards, they love talking to local producers, purchasing from farm gates, farmers markets, driving past equestrian and cattle studs - seeing where their food comes from, walking, cycling, fishing in our parks and state forests. Coming to the area is a counterpoint to their busy city lives filled with noise, traffic congestion, pollution, concrete and asphalt, light pollution, heavy trucks, noise, and yet more traffic. I am afraid that truck and traffic movements associated with the mine will impact this beautiful historic town, dust will be coating it, noise, blasting, light pollution (all happening only 2kms away has a greater effect in a quiet rural setting) will also be detrimental. Visitors come here for clean air, clean water, clean soils, clean escape. Ruin that and they wont come and we wont have viable businesses to run.

Accommodation..

I take huge umbrage over the fact that in the EIS, the assertion from Hume Coal is that accommodation in the area will be greatly advantaged by the project - they state that all the construction workers will need accommodation. Other than one three star motel in Berrima, there is predominantly four and five star accommodation within the mines vicinity. With so few suitable low cost rooms in the area for workers, I cant see Hume Coal putting their construction and miners up at the next closest properties being Peppers Craigieburn or Peppers Mount Broughton for long! The accommodation properties that are in the mines vicinity (hugely under reported in numbers in the EIS - Hume obviously didn't ask Tourism Southern Highlands for their information), they are boutique guesthouses, bed and breakfasts, farm stays and self contained rentals. They all rely on their rural, green, quiet country clean environment for their business viability, and currently cater for recreational weekend guests, wedding guests, conferences and events. Again, not a great attraction having a mine just down the road and with trucks, construction traffic, rail noise, blasting, construction noise, light pollution and dust all impacting your business during the three year construction phase and some elements continuing over the next 19 years of activity.

The assertion in the EIS of an accommodation "bonanza" for the area is a double falsehood, with information provided later in the document that accommodation will be built and provided on site by the company during the construction phase. No doubt meals and an on site store will also provide for the workers living there during the construction phase. No nett benefit for the local F&B businesses there either.

Jobs Bonanza..

The EIS promises a LOCAL jobs bonanza. The skilled workers needed for this project are not available in the area (as advised by one of our local recruitment firms). The skilled workers required will be travelling up the Hume Highway from Western Sydney, Illawarra and the Picton/ Wilton areas, where mining redundancies are huge at present due to downsizing and automation (that wont happen here after construction phase will it?). Hume Coals' assertion of a LOCAL jobs boom is absolute poppycock. And the provision of accommodation on site according to the plans provided by Hume Coal, would further indicate that workers will not be local - more likely of either a fly in and fly out type or perhaps even an international workforce potentially may be accommodated?

I may be so alarmist to suggest that after our agribusinesses contract their operations due to lack of water and finance, the wedding venues loose bookings because of the area turning into an

industrial site, coal dust covering everything within the mine and rail vicinity, wineries and tourist attractions loose custom and their ability to expand, and all the flow on affects of loss of tourist custom will bring to the Berrima district, when we no longer are an attractive green space escape for those needing a getaway, we will actually have a local area NETT JOBS LOSS due to this proposed project! All for one business of 19 year predicted longevity and one that will provide only a handful of jobs after construction. What "jobs bonanza" will be there for our kids in this area in 19 years time when everything we are now known for is gone - clean water, clean air, clean soil? poof!

Water..

In the Berrima area are a number of agribusinesses that will be directly affected by the proposed mine. These businesses all rely heavily on bore water for their continued activities. The drawdown of water from the aquifer by the mine according to the EIS (and it is a best case scenario that is put forward), will have a great effect on these businesses. I know of two agribusinesses in the Berrima footprint that have had their expansion proposals rejected by the banks as the property valuations (used as collateral for the loans) have dropped by a third over the past six years. There are probably more, these are just two owners I personally know. These are jobs not being created, businesses that are now not seeing their potential, food not being produced and to top it off, some of NSW's closest prime agricultural land to the Sydney Metro area has lost a third of its value! How does that work? Tell someone in Sydney that their property has just lost 1/3 of its value and the water they need to survive and earn their living is now uncertain and see what impact it has on their well being!

Guest concerns..

Our Sydney guests are concerned about these issues and know that they will have a connected impact on them. They know their food comes from places like this, they know their water comes from the catchment areas of which Wingecarribee is a major part, they know their air is cleaned by huge National Park and State Forest green spaces, and they don't like the fact that it is under threat. They have been telling me and voicing their concerns, but because they do not live in the area, after changes in the laws making the concerns of people outside the direct area redundant, they feel like they cant do anything about it. I can however, pass on their concerns.

Health Impacts..

I know of fellow operators who now have health issues from the stress and uncertainty of the past six years. They are now trying unsuccessfully to sell businesses within the mines proposed footprint. I have seen the direct impact caused by the decrease in land and business values because of the proposal. I have friends who cannot expand their businesses due to the bank refusing loans because their property has decreased in value by a third because they are in the mines vicinity. This is insane.

Finally..

Nothing in this proposal makes sense, and the six years of uncertainty, the mental and health toll that this ongoing battle has had on the local community is incalculable. The angst caused to locals in the direct vicinity has caused health issues, exacerbated cancer, stress, mental health issues, marital breakdown and untold and ongoing damage. It needs to stop.

Business operators cant get loans to expand to provide viable jobs and are denied a chance to progress profitable businesses, property values have plummeted, the risk of prime agricultural land loosing essential water access to continue food production is too high, the potential to ruin our fragile aquifers, breaking rock strata, causing irreparable damage to the water table (isnt this exactly why the nearby Medway Mine is no longer operational?). Haven't we learned from past experiences?

The potential negative effect on tourism to the area that this project may bring is so enormous. This could directly and indirectly impact about one third of jobs in the area. Is this sensible?

Nothing about this proposal makes sense and I call for Hume Coals submission to be rejected, by the Sate Government Department of Planning and Environment.

