

Hume Coal Project EIS. SSD 7172

My wife and I object to this proposed project and believe it should be rejected as a result of the impact on the following:

By way of introduction, my wife and I moved from Sydney however, had been continuous visitors to the area for over 30 years, both as day trippers and short stay visitors attracted by the beauty of the area. It is now 2 years since we moved to the Southern Highlands and are enjoying the lifestyle the area has to offer. We find it incredulous that there even exists a debate as to whether or not the area should be subjected to coal mining. The beauty of the area is confirmed by the scenery and the clean and green atmosphere it offers.

Water

Our concern relates to the potential destruction of the aquifers being part of the Sydney catchment and effect on our producers. Non-pollution of those is not a guarantee that Hume Coal can readily confirm but the potential for polluting is certainly there. Movement in the earth is also a concern. In December 1989 Newcastle experienced an earthquake measuring 5.5. It was felt over an area of 200,000 square kilometres. Closer to this area, in March 1973 Picton experienced a quake of 5.5. Indeed in May 1961 Bowral experienced a quake of 5.8. There have been other tremors and from my research documented going back to 1935. The impacts of this form of ground disturbance on both bores and aquifers is self-evident. This reminds one of the impact mining had on Thirlmere Lakes, a once often frequented area where people in the 1960's would water ski. It is well known the area was mined for coal and over the years the water drained away and now there are no lakes but warning signs to visitors advising them of not to go beyond a certain point given the dangers of sinking into the mud. This should be a warning to us of the potential for what could happen to our water. It is interesting to note the mining company of the day denied their mining had any impact or cause for the loss of the majority of the water resulting in the mud pool it is today. This denial is quite blatant. Keep in mind that mining pollution by its nature has a proven adverse impact on fauna, flora, creeks and wetlands.

Bores

Farms and homes rely heavily on bore water particularly during periods of drought and to have the levels lowered for the sake of coal mining is unacceptable. We are talking about the impact on the agricultural growth industry and the individual family livelihood. Having to rely on town water becomes a necessity. This poses an extra and unnecessary strain on our water supply especially during times of drought. It must be noted that the aquifers are a source of supply to the wider Sydney Catchment Area feeding into Warragamba Dam.

Winds

In 2016 we experienced strong winds for several months and some in excess of 80 kilometres per hour. We recall Sydney airport was shut once those winds reached 65 kilometres per hour. Our concern is that with winds of this magnitude and, even below, the movement of coal dust in the atmosphere will impact on the residents in the affected area (Refer Dust Diseases Board). Bear in mind dust travels over hundreds of kilometres and studies have found an increase in the rates of mortality from lung cancer, skin and bladder cancer, hypertension, kidney disease, stroke, COPD and

asthma. Respiratory systems such as coughing and wheezing have also been known to appear. Blood studies have shown higher levels of heavy metals such as lead and cadmium. In relation to children, we learn of higher rates of preterm births, low birth weight, miscarriages and stillbirths. Clearly there has to be an adverse impact on community health, particularly in the large number of children in the subject area alone (note the number of schools in the Southern Highlands).

Tourism

It is well known, tourism is one of the biggest drawcards of the Southern Highlands. Just this June long weekend when the weather was quite damp the streets, coffee shops and restaurants were overflowing with tourists who had come to enjoy the beauty of the area. Bowral, Berrima, Mittagong and Moss Vale and Sutton Forest are areas that are often frequented and indeed are stop off points between Sydney and Canberra. The financial benefits to the local area runs into the millions of dollars annually allowing for not only coffee shops and restaurants, but also for local fresh produce, crops, olives, grapes, wine and meat which are sourced locally. Motels, hotels and B&B accommodation provide a well serviced need for the area. This a far smaller and concentrated area than the Hunter Valley to which Hume Coal referred regarding tourism (it has a history of decades of tourists visiting there). We believe the possibility for tourism to decrease in the Southern Highlands is a distinct possibility.

Businesses

Entrepreneurs in the area have invested thousands of dollars be it for cattle breeding, olives, grapes, produce, berries, etc, in order to contribute to the economy and provide a living. There now exists an uncertainty as to whether to expand or invest further in their ventures. The impact of coal mining has put their lives on hold as they await an uncertain future. Will there be the clientele in the future, indeed will there be water security – the impact is a matter to be considered and the stress on families surely a reality?

Recreation

The Southern Highlands is an attractive area for recreation and escape from the daily grind, and certainly a sought after area in which to live. This is evidenced by the expanding development of areas at Mittagong such as Nattai Ponds and Retford Park at Bowral. People are buying into the Southern Highlands as evidenced by the weekly housing clearance rates. There is also the growing need for aged care and retirement facilities in the area. The impact of coal mining is inconsistent with these.

Conclusion

Mining companies have a corporate social responsibility and in particular to the residents directly affected and those further afield. To quote from our reading, “the disruptive nature of mining activities means the local communities have the potential to suffer severe negative impacts as a result of mining operations, including environmental degradation, health risks, land and water use conflicts, and social underdevelopment.”

Hume Coal refers to the millions of dollars of royalties the State will receive and the jobs being created. We question how many of these jobs will be short term? Where will the workers be housed

– in existing hotels and motels usually used by tourists? How much of the area will be “destroyed” for the reasons already covered? We find it beyond belief the government would even entertain the idea of the potential medium and long term damage that would occur as a result of mining in this part of NSW.

We submit that coal mining within the designated area is inconsistent with the “clean green” perception of the Southern Highlands and should be rejected out of hand. When reading the EIS as submitted by Hume Coal we see words such as “ mitigation strategy, negligible, minimise, minimal impact” which raises alarm bells. The word “guarantee” does not appear as indeed no mining company can offer this. What is clear and even in their own words there exists this underlying uncertainty which once in place, and once they have left the region, will no longer be seen to be their problem, however we the residents and the tourists will indeed be affected.