

# **Hume Coal Project (SSD 7172) - EIS submission June 2017**

## **Introduction**

This submission is lodged on behalf of Exeter Village Association (EVA), an organisation of more than 170 members, which represents the communities of Exeter and Sutton Forest (population 1410).

At the General Meeting of EVA held on 20 Feb 2017, the preparation of a submission opposing this development was endorsed. I, as a member and Treasurer of the presiding Committee, was authorised on 04 May 2017 to lodge this submission.

## **Context**

Exeter and Sutton Forest are two small villages set in a rural hinterland in the Southern Highlands (SH). SH is an attractive area for tourism, agricultural and rural industry. It is a drawcard for weekend escapes, dining, weddings, accommodation (including luxury and upmarket), golf and wineries within picturesque countryside that provides a range of employment and destinations for many visitors, especially from Sydney.

This submission illustrates how the introduction of a coal mine and associated infrastructure and rail facility are not compatible with this region, and also threaten the livelihoods, future investment potential, enjoyment and character of the locality.

## **Reasons for opposing the Coal Mine**

### **1. Change character of the area with adverse social impacts**

Current uses and employment in the area comprise a range of tourist opportunities such as wineries/vineyards, hotels, restaurants/cafes, B & B accommodation, golf courses and farming – mostly with stock, but also commercial orchards and crops. These uses provide a highly desirable lifestyle for its residents, but are also a great attraction for visitors, as evidenced by thousands of people attending such events as Bowral Tulip festival, Southern Highlands Food and Wine Festival, Bowral Cycling Classic, Brigadoon and Bong Bong races, to name a few. The area is also a noted wedding and reception venue where bookings are made years in advance.

A coal mine is anathema to these uses and activities and would lead to many of these being impacted by reduced patronage or limited by an uncertain future that discourages investment. The EIS is mischievous in not considering these many existing uses. For example, there are many more 'tourism establishments' than the '3' mentioned in 19.4.3.iv of the EIS. It undervalues and superficially dismisses the impacts the mine would have on them and the social impact on the residents and tourists who use them. A mine would detract from the area, in contrast to the drawing power of these existing uses and activities.

2. Threaten many existing tourism/commercial uses and agricultural/rural livelihoods and their future viability

There are 93 private landholder bores on 71 properties which are predicted to suffer a drawdown of 2m or more. High water users such as berry or olive farms, vineyards and livestock farmers are highly reliant on groundwater, especially in dry periods. Loss of groundwater access via bores or inability to 'make good' such loss, e.g., through trucking water supply is not seen to be practical, particularly as bores are unlikely to be fully recharged for decades and the water still has to be sourced and trucked in from another location. Further, if the viability of such uses becomes uncertain, finance would be difficult to obtain from lending bodies to ensure their continuation &/or investment for expansion.

3. Potential contamination of aquifer from recycling mine waste into the mine

Given the porosity of the overlying sandstone aquifer, there is concern that recycling mine waste into the mine could lead to contamination of the groundwater. It would seem that the proposed method of mining at the relatively shallow depth and the placement of slurry in the mined cells has not been proven to be safe in this respect. Contamination of the groundwater bores would have adverse impacts on water use and compromise activities that rely on this source.

4. Pollution from coal dust in times of strong winds.

Given the height and size of stockpiles and their vicinity to Berrima and the freeway, strong southerly and westerly winds at times are likely to convey coal dust/particulates into Berrima, New Berrima, Moss Vale, Sutton Forest, Exeter and onto the freeway, as it is recognised that complete control of dust cannot be achieved in these situations. Apart from the grit, the particulate dust would pose a health hazard to residents and drivers.

5. Investment in an unrenewable resource being a poor energy option

In this day of climate change and greenhouse effect, mining coal is considered a poor option in relation to investment in renewable resources and the mine would be a contributing polluter to these phenomena through burning and the release of carbon into the atmosphere. Including the end use of coal, in excess of 6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide will be released into the atmosphere. The 'do nothing' option is therefore considered appropriate and in the light of the trend towards obsolete coal-powered electricity generating stations being closed down across the world.

6. Impact on road traffic and safety from additional trains: Berrima Rail Project (SSD – 7171)

Additional train traffic using a new rail spur line required for the Hume Coal Project (i.e., Berrima Rail Project- SSD 7171) will lead to delays to traffic on Wingecarribee roads. While recognising that the crossing of Berrima Road would be grade separated, an increase of more than 30% in train traffic using existing level rail crossings will cause substantial delays to traffic using Douglas Road in two locations and Sheepwash Road, thereby potentially compromise safety. Train traffic will also cause delays to other level crossings in Robertson and all the way down the line to the Port Kembla Coal Loader. As a result, emergency vehicles may be delayed

in responding to critical calls at these times. A submission opposing SSD – 7171 has been made in this regard.

#### 7. Economic viability of mine questionable

Given the investment required to establish, operate the mine, the rehabilitate the land, whilst only recovering 35% of the resource, it would seem that the revenue from sale of coal would be marginal, especially in the light of lost revenue and employment from tourism, local industries and commercial activities affected. As stated in the EIS, unemployment in SH is low and diverse, so a case for mining employment is difficult to sustain as a reason for approving the project. Further, any employment generated by the mine would not be sustainable in the longer term given that it has a finite life.

#### 8. Potential adverse impact on Oldbury Creek

During times of high rainfall, the EIS states that there could be some discharge of surface water from stormwater basins containing contaminants into Oldbury Creek (see 7.4.2). There is concern that, if not treated appropriately, the water quality of the creek and downstream users could be adversely impacted.

### **Conclusion**

The Hume Coal Project (and related Berrima Rail Project) are opposed on the grounds that they will:

- Change and adversely affect the character and quality of living in the Southern Highlands.
- The Projects pose a real and long term threat to tourism and livelihoods in the local area, particularly those landholders whose bores will be affected by drawdown or contamination
- There is a high level of concern that access to and the quality of groundwater in and beyond the project area will be adversely affected.
- There is a lack of confidence in the viability of the method of coal extraction given the absence of precedent, and the means to contain toxic mine waste in the resultant underground cells.
- The viability of the mine is questioned both in economic and environmental terms having regard to the proposed yield, and trend towards renewable energy.
- There are significant concerns with respect to dust (health), traffic (delays and safety), and Oldbury Creek (water quality).

In accordance with the above submission, Exeter Village Association requests that the Hume Coal and Berrima Rail Projects be refused.

**Rick Beers**

Treasurer, on behalf of Exeter Village Association