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Attention: Executive Director, Resource Assessments

Department of Planning and Environment

GPO Box 39

Sydney NSW 2001

## **Submission for Consideration in regard to Hume Coal EIS SSD7172 and Berrima Rail Project SSD7171**

### **Preamble**

We had been visitors to the Southern Highlands for many years when finally in 2011, we realised our dream to relocate from Sydney and retire in Exeter. Our purpose in moving to this area was to be part of a natural and beautiful countryside removed from urban sprawl and noisy pressures. This has been so and we have enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere, quiet roads and unspoilt scenery which is a feast to the eyes. It is therefore no wonder that we are very concerned with the possibility of a coal mine being created in the area and oppose the Hume Coal Project for the following reasons:

#### **1 Vista**

The Southern Highlands is a mecca for tourists especially those wanting a nearby escape from metropolitan Sydney. The Southern Highlands has been building a business of catering for tourists, accommodation alternatives, wedding venues, cafes and restaurants and activities such as markets (monthly in Bowral, Mittagong, Exeter, Sutton Forest etc), festivals (Tulip Time, Brigadoon, Bong Bong Races, Southern Highlands Food and Wine Festival, etc) and boutique or individual shopping experiences. In addition, the Cluster groups being organised in conjunction with the operators of The Loch in Sutton Forest are bringing eco-tourism to the area which benefits both producers (farmers, growers, makers, etc), the community and the visiting public. All this could be jeopardised by an increase in the industrialisation or “blots on the landscape” through the development of a mining industry. In addition, employment numbers in the tourism industry (currently 2,500 individuals) could be seriously threatened.

#### **2 Water**

The possible effect on the water table is a great concern, not only because the actual extent of physical spread of the effects are unknown, but also because many bores on properties currently used will no longer be available. Water for these properties and their stock and crops will have to be sourced from another location. Although Hume Coal is offering compensation for the lack of bore water, it does not recognise that water will still have to be sourced from somewhere and trucked in from other areas which also therefore increases the number of trucks using Southern Highland's roads.

### **3 Rail movement**

The development of the proposed coal mine would require expanded use of the existing minimally-used rail line west to east through Berrima, Sheepwash Road and Robertson which will significantly impact residential areas along this route with increased rail noise. Also, as this rail line currently requires level crossings, increased usage will not only delay traffic significantly but create serious dangers for road users with the potential for increased accidents.

### **4 Dust**

The variable weather conditions experienced in the Southern Highlands means that high winds are common at certain times of the year. Coal dust is not a contaminant that residents want in their area for health or environmental reasons.

### **5 Impact on community**

Residents of the Southern Highlands are proud of the area they live in, with a friendly country atmosphere and peaceful scenic surroundings. Berrima, the nearest village to the proposed coal mine, is an historic town which depends on visiting tourists to the independent shops, hotel, museum, church, court house, cafes and the National Trust property, Harpers Mansion and also several wineries, with cellar doors, in the vicinity. A coal mine in this area will seriously affect the attractiveness of the area for tourists and locals alike. Although accepting that change must happen in a developing world, the community has a right to fight to retain what is beautiful and unspoilt in their region, especially when the Hume Coal project will only bring short-term benefits to the area (in employment and profit) if this does happen. Residents would have to live with, then be left with the scar on their landscape and little, if any, return and certainly none to appease the tourist market or encourage them to return.

## **Summary**

Due to the uncertainty of the benefit of the Hume Coal project and the obvious and adverse impacts to the tourism, economy and beauty of the Southern Highlands, we strongly oppose this project and hope that those considering the EIS will be mindful that once this pristine area and resources are damaged, there is little guarantee of complete remediation, both above and below the ground.

We ask the Government to reject this project and thank you for your consideration.

**Rick Beers**

**Jennifer Beers**