

## Submission to the Department of Planning NSW re: Hume Coal Project EIS. Breach of trust: Social division via social media by Hume Coal

I submit that Hume Coal cannot be trusted with the civic responsibility of being a major employer within The Southern Highlands.

As a self purported employer of initially 400 people from wherever they can be found (for construction) and a subsequent permanent 'locally' sourced workforce of 300, Hume Coal have direct influence of a large percentage of the local community.

What sort of credentials does Hume Coal provide to ethically manage this influence? As Hume Coal has no construction, mine operation or large scale employment experience to offer we can only judge by their past actions in the one area where they have worked assiduously to achieve their aims, that of social media.

### Social media.

The Hume Coal Project runs an active Facebook page. This includes daily posts and frequent commentary on their own posts and the responses of page visitors.

It has approximately 1400 likes, (at the time of writing - these are people who have chosen to receive notifications of new posts in their own Facebook news feeds).

<https://www.facebook.com/humecoalproject/>

They also operate a Twitter account and a website.

The Twitter feed consists of summary versions of their Facebook posts and has 35 followers and 4 likes.

<https://twitter.com/humecoalproject>

The website is used to post media releases and information on the project. It does not allow for comments, feedback or public forum discussion.

<https://www.humecoal.com.au/>

Following the release of the EIS they also established a website for the specific stated purpose of letting people 'have your say'. This site specifies the specific areas of discussion, deletes anything off topic, opens each topic in sequence (and closes all others) and requires registration. It has almost no comments on it as a result.

<http://yoursay.humecoal.com.au/>

For the above reasons I will focus my submission on the Hume Coal Project Facebook page.

### Divide and conquer.

Due to the level of content, what with daily posts, it's not practicable to comprehensively represent every instance of Hume Coal's approach to community outreach. It should, however, be clear from the brief sampling represented below that Hume Coal regards anyone opposed or unsure about the merits of the project as an enemy. The name they give to their 'enemies' is: **activists**.

In order to garner support to their cause they have assiduously worked to represent anyone in opposition to the coal mine plan, regardless of the reason, to be:

- Liars.
- Anti-jobs.
- Anti-opportunity.
- Anti-business.
- Anti-steel.
- Working to deprive people of energy.

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Purported opposition to 'jobs and opportunity'.

"Its no surprise that the anti-coal activists are once again promoting mistruths to ultimately deprive this community of development, jobs and opportunity for the future of this region"

*Hume Coal, Facebook post, February 8, 2017*

"...a local minority continue their campaign to destroy jobs, hinder business and stifle oppourtunity (sic) for local residents."

*Hume Coal, Facebook post, January 10, 2017*

"Hume Coal – No Coal Seam Gas – The only 'gas' comes from those opposed to opportunities for local people. Ignore the 'gas' 'get the facts."

*Hume Coal, Facebook post, December 21, 2016*

"..local activist groups would prefer to stifle any development and opportunity in the Southern Highlands."

*Hume Coal, Facebook post, December 3, 2016*

Purported opposition to energy generation.

"Local anti-coal activists want to stop coal for power – like South Australia they want us in the dark"

*Hume Coal, Facebook post, December 24, 2016*

"The Greens at it again - working hard to stop jobs, development, economic progress and make sure NSW families and businesses suffer."

*Hume Coal, Facebook post, March 4, 2017*

Purported liars.

"Like the local anti-coal and anti-job activist groups, all credibility is lost when you choose to fabricate the data, promoting lies and mistruths."

*Hume Coal, Facebook post, December 19, 2016*

Purported anti-business

"Well well well.... the anti coal activists have finally hijacked a 'bus', demanding the removal of Hume Coal advertisements from Berrima Buslines. Congratulations on costing a local company income in a tough industry providing an essential service. What's next – hijacking future jobs for local people?"

*Hume Coal, Facebook post, November 18, 2016*

Hume Coal does not hold the exclusive right to claim support for jobs, opportunity, energy generation or even steel production. By repeatedly conflating opposition to their project with a supposed opposition to such universal positives as employment and opportunity they create a false dichotomy which serves to needlessly divide a small community. We depend on harmony and understanding to best serve the needs of our community's constituents. Hume Coal is already causing harm, before even laying the first brick on their proposed construction.

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### Encouraging division.

The Hume Coal Facebook page makes the following statement:

“This forum is an opportunity to express those opinions however the following actions will not be tolerated:

- Abusive, offensive or harmful contents, directed at Hume Coal, POSCO or any person
- Content which advocates intimidation, bullying or violence
- Content which is blatantly misleading or untrue”

This is a standard Hume Coal applies only to those who stand or comment in opposition to the projects objectives. Comments which besmirch or even threaten members of the community who comment against the mine are left untouched by their page moderator(s). Negative, personal comments which do not support the mine support the mine are met with moderation and directed to a reminder of the above listed standards. This is applied inconsistently and some negative comments are left un-moderated to encourage responses.

Pro-Hume comments are not moderated.

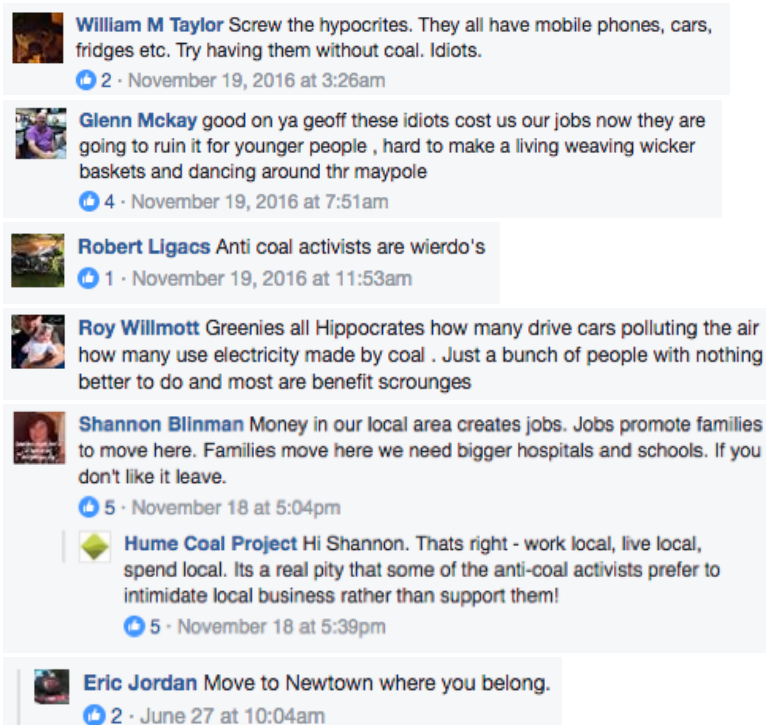
This disparity in treatment has the net effect of encouraging negative commentary towards mine ‘dissenters’ and lowers the overall tone of the entire discussion. It further serves to divide community members.

Hume Coal frequently reminds readers of the talking points they want their supporters to comment on and seeks to foster aggression and even goad commenters into expressing negative views which are based in broad, sweeping statements. Once again, by conflating separate groups and individuals into a singular, less relatable group, namely ‘activists’, the page visitors that Hume Coal encourages are given social permission to say things which would not be tolerated in normal conversation or in open, offline public forums.

The very kind that Hume Coal ceased to conduct, despite promising to do so, in 2016.

### Hume Coal Facebook page comment samples.

Un-moderated and encouraged.



**William M Taylor** Screw the hypocrites. They all have mobile phones, cars, fridges etc. Try having them without coal. Idiots.  
2 · November 19, 2016 at 3:26am

**Glenn McKay** good on ya geoff these idiots cost us our jobs now they are going to ruin it for younger people , hard to make a living weaving wicker baskets and dancing around thr maypole  
4 · November 19, 2016 at 7:51am

**Robert Ligacs** Anti coal activists are wierdo's  
1 · November 19, 2016 at 11:53am

**Roy Willmott** Greenies all Hippocrates how many drive cars polluting the air how many use electricity made by coal . Just a bunch of people with nothing better to do and most are benefit scrounges

**Shannon Blinman** Money in our local area creates jobs. Jobs promote families to move here. Families move here we need bigger hospitals and schools. If you don't like it leave.  
5 · November 18 at 5:04pm

**Hume Coal Project** Hi Shannon. Thats right - work local, live local, spend local. Its a real pity that some of the anti-coal activists prefer to intimidate local business rather than support them!  
5 · November 18 at 5:39pm


**Eric Jordan** Move to Newtown where you belong.  
2 · June 27 at 10:04am


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
 **Ivor Nelson** Jeff they only make comments and won't enter into giving replies to questions  
1 · January 25 at 4:47pm


 **Hume Coal Project** Its hard to argue a point when you dont base your argument on data, facts or science.  
January 28 at 9:20am


 **Hume Coal Project** Unfortunately the activist groups dont like facts.  
5 · February 8 at 9:30pm

 **Shannon Blinman** Money in our local area creates jobs. Jobs promote families to move here. Families move here we need bigger hospitals and schools. If you don't like it leave.  
5 · November 18 at 5:04pm


 **Hume Coal Project** Hi Shannon. Thats right - work local, live local, spend local. Its a real pity that some of the anti-coal activists prefer to intimidate local business rather than support them!  
5 · November 18 at 5:39pm


 **Virginia Ellsmore** How come you are so scared of facts you have not the guts to hold a open public meeting?? Or meet with Council. The opposition is too clever for you !!!  
May 2 at 3:53pm


 **Rob Loiterton** Why go before moronic left wing retards like Larry Whipper and Co...If he had his way all working class locals would be sent to the gas chambers to make way for more yuppy wankers from Sydney.  
June 20 at 7:50pm


 **Layne Green** Shouldn't change anything on this post, we all getting sick of hypocrite greenies lying all the time and making shit up!!!  
May 17 at 10:39pm


Moderated.


 **Jade Deppeler** I wanna work for you guys  
April 8, 2016 at 6:03pm

 **Hume Coal Project** Hi Jade, we're taking expressions of interest. You can go to our employment page at <http://www.humecoal.com.au/local-jobs/employment-2>

 **Virginia Ellsmore** I think you should employ Jade. She sounds perfect for your organization.  
1 · April 15, 2016 at 2:44pm

 **Hume Coal Project** Hi Virginia, please only post constructive comments. Comments which could be construed as a personal attack on an individual will not be tolerated.  
April 15, 2016 at 7:12pm

 **Virginia Ellsmore** Time to leave Posco Hume I am getting sick of your bullshit perfect mine plan  
June 15 at 10:53am

 **Hume Coal Project** Hi Virginia. Try and keep the language respectful. With regard to groundwater, the underground first workings mine design protects the integrity of the overlying strata. The make good measures will ensure no farmer, gardener or other user is left without access to groundwater. /Ben  
June 15 at 11:12am

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**Charmaine Roth** Wow Hume Coal...you are really stooping to an all time low. I come to this page to get the facts on your proposed mine ...not to read trash and watch as you blatantly try divide the community.

### Questions raised.

The Hume Coal Project EIS makes two passing references to their social media activities. Their Facebook page is updated on a daily basis, has a large following and occupies at least 5% of their full time staff of 17.

- Why is there no policy made plain as to their social media objectives in the EIS beyond 'providing information'?
- What are they hoping to achieve with their commentary, selective moderation and politicised posts?
- How does referring to mine detractors as activists and accusing them of being liars and anti-opportunity reflect the truth?
- What damage have they already done to the social cohesion so vital to community harmony?

### Summary conclusion.

The result of Hume Coal's efforts is the impression that the community is divided. The truth is that The Southern Highlands is a tolerant, caring and democratic environment. We don't need an outsider multinational company to cultivate the worst in people for their own profit. The damage they are doing and will continue to do is significant and deserves the attention of the NSW Department of Planning.

Quite aside from my concerns over the poor planning, economic fragility and damage to a vital aquifer system, I am deeply concerned about an irresponsible attitude towards social cohesion in this area by Hume Coal. The company seems to imagine that having set up shop it is now a valid member of the community with all the rights and privileges of an individual. In the company's view this appears to be the right to take a partisan view of community objectives and for it to be allowed the freedom to manipulate real anxieties over lack of employment to its own ends.

There is confusion amongst those who support Hume Coal. The project has heavily promoted the promise of 300 jobs. This promise does not come with a clear explanation that jobs would be at least five years away from Hume Coal gaining approval and that even then those jobs would be vulnerable to coal price fluctuation and replacement of human workers with automation. Their employment 'catchment' includes Goulburn, which is incidentally where most skilled mining workers in the region reside. The high-paid, local job, that is going to allow someone's newly high school graduated son move into, is a falsehood. It is however, an impression that Hume promotes with abandon.

The cavalier attitude shown by Hume Coal to the effect on the community's social cohesion, a dismissive approach to concerns and a 'promise the moon' scattergun tactic with money thrown around and jobs touted at every opportunity has left the community confused, concerned, afraid and ignored on the one hand and filled with dreams of high paid work that simply do not meet the standard of truth they claim to hold a singular license upon, on the other.

It is easy to make big promises, especially when you aim them at people in need. It has been seen time and time again to fail people when it is done at the expense of a reasonable, respectful and honest communication with those same people.

It is nothing more than populism at the expense of community cohesion. It is unAustralian.

The Government of NSW and the people of The Southern Highlands deserve better.