

To Whom It May Concern,

As the board members and staff of Aurora, one of the Southern Highlands' independent primary schools, we are writing to urge you to reject the proposal to establish a coal mine near Berrima.

We share the well-founded concerns of the Wingecarribee Shire Council when it comes to the impact of such a project, and believe that Hume Coal's Environmental Impact Statement seriously understates the would-be effects. Tourism, water resources, social wellbeing, cultural capital, economic niches and biodiversity would undoubtedly suffer in irreversible ways should such a project go ahead.

Looking more specifically on the likely impacts on our school and its employees, students and parents, the following are major concerns:

- Nearly 30% of families at our school have moved to the area to bring up their children in an environment that is healthier, quieter, more natural and slower-paced than urban settings. We continue to attract new families to the area for these reasons, as the area offers a unique balance of proximity to major cities and the benefits of regional living. The proposed project and associated rail expansion would significantly compromise the character of the area, and the Southern Highlands would no longer be regarded as a first choice, healthy place to raise and educate a family.
- The particle pollution and wind drift, significantly downplayed in Hume Coal's Environmental Impact Statement, poses a major, long-term health risk for people of all ages, but most especially for infants and children. Breathing difficulties, lung conditions and allergies have been demonstrated to influence growth rates, nutritional uptake and emotional wellbeing. In short, air particle pollution could have a serious impact on the levels of health, success and fulfilment that our students are to experience throughout their lives.
- The proposed project would cause significant disruption to habitats and biodiversity in our school's local area, through the building of infrastructure, wind drift pollution and the disruption of the water cycle. As a school that prides itself on excellence in scientific investigation and inquiry, our students are keenly aware of the status of local species, their habitat needs, and their places within larger systems and ecosystems. Local habitats are our learning ground for nature studies and scientific inquiry, and are also fundamental to our students' sense of wellbeing and agency. While recognising the needs of a growing human population, we are committed to the integrity of our local habitats, and are seriously opposed to the irreparable damage that would be caused by the proposed mine and associated rail expansion.
- To establish a new coal mine would send a clearly outdated and disempowering message to the generation of young people who attend schools throughout the Southern Highlands today. As educators, we work tirelessly to impart in all students a sense of responsibility for the future health of the planet, a sense of power and agency in creating positive change, an ability to innovate and solve problems in cutting-edge ways, and an ability to forge visions of bright futures in a world that works for all. Against this background, one shared by many educators in a range of settings across our shire, the establishment of a coal mine would seriously compromise the very direction of our educational endeavour.

We do not take for granted the fact that we, as a school, are free to make this submission and record our substantial objections. We are aware of many individual educators, administrators and community members of other schools who, because of the politicised nature of this proposal, do not feel free to voice their opinions and make their submissions formally. Therefore, we ask that you please pause to consider our concerns as concerns not only for the students of our one school, but for the young people of our region now and into the future.

With the above matters taken into consideration, we request that you reject permanently and in its entirety the proposal for a new coal mine affecting the Southern Highlands.

Sincerely,

James Goodlet
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