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HUME COAL PROJECT EIS SSD 15_7172

SUBMISSION TO COMMENT ON PROPOSALS OUTLINED IN THE EIS

I totally object to the underground coal mine proposed by Hume Coal in the Southern Highlands of NSW for the following reasons.

1. Impact on Groundwater

If the mine proceeds the main aquifer for the Southern Highlands will be drained and more than 90 water bores, primarily used for agriculture, will be left totally or partially dry for decades. Even the mining company acknowledges this will happen in the EIS. This is totally unacceptable.

The people who rely on their bore water for agricultural businesses during our long, hot, dry summers will have their livelihoods destroyed. It is physically impossible for Hume Coal or anyone to truck enough water to these properties and the EIS does not explain how the loss of water will be addressed.

In addition, as the aquifer is drained of its water reserves, the general water table level will also be lowered in areas where the aquifer sandstone is exposed at the surface, such as the Sutton Forest and Berrima localities. The EIS acknowledges that this will happen. The lowering of the water table will then very likely affect the large, old trees in this area. During the hot, dry summers and periods of drought they rely on the deep groundwater reserves to survive, and if these are depleted or non-existent many will be severely stressed or die. Landowners in the area have planted many trees over the decades, both native and exotic species, to provide wind breaks, shade and habitats for animals. The EIS does not address what will happen to these trees when the water table drops. It is certainly not possible to hand water them. The government cannot risk a large area of the Highlands losing its trees.

2. Dust

The mine plans to have coal stockpiles at its site at Medway. This means coal dust will be deposited over large areas of the Highlands by the wind. Being significantly elevated, the Highlands is subjected to often severe to gale force winds on a seasonal basis. In the summer the strong north westerly winds will blow coal dust over the southern towns of Moss Vale, Exeter and Bundanoon and the rural areas around them. In the autumn, winter and spring the winds are predominantly very strong (or worse) west to south westerlies, and can blow for a week straight (without even dying down over night). These winds will cover Mittagong, Bowral and Berrima with coal dust. There is no way anyone will be able to stop the wind blowing the coal dust everywhere.

The dust will cause respiratory problems for many people, especially those at higher risk, such as the elderly and people who suffer from asthma. Given that the Southern Highlands has attracted a large number of retirees to move here from Sydney, there will be a huge proportion of people that will likely suffer.

The coal dust will also cover and make unsightly the beautiful gardens, parks and rural areas that visitors to the Highlands come to see.

3. Impact on Village of Berrima

The proposed mine will have a huge impact on the historic town of Berrima because it is so close to the mine surface operations centre and the proposed railway extension runs just south of the town. Businesses in Berrima totally rely on tourism, and with the coal dust issue, noise and ugly coal trains close by it is very likely tourists will prefer to go elsewhere and hundreds of businesses will be adversely effected or ruined.

In addition, the town's water supply will likely be significantly affected by the drawdown of the groundwater, to the point where it is likely that it might eventually run dry. This area also has a high risk of losing many of its trees, as previously stated. This is totally unacceptable.

4. Impact on the Economy of the Highlands

The economy of the Southern Highlands is very much dependent on tourism. People visit because they love the clean air, peace and quiet and the beautiful trees and gardens. If these things are destroyed by this mine visitors will go elsewhere. Thousands of people are employed by businesses which directly and indirectly service the people who come to visit the Highlands. If visitor numbers reduce significantly these businesses will not survive.

The EIS claims that 300 jobs will be created by the mine, but most of these will not be local jobs. The few jobs that may go to locals will be swamped by the thousands of local jobs and livelihoods lost in the tourism and agricultural sectors.

5. Risk to Sydney's Water Supply

If the Hume Coal mine proceeds there is a big risk that Sydney's water supply could be contaminated. The EIS states that waste water from the mine will be released into Oldbury Creek, which runs into the Wingecarribee River and Sydney's water supply. It would only take one serious accident and the water supply could be contaminated with toxic mine waste. The government cannot risk this happening.

6. Mine Waste

The EIS claims that the mine waste will be pumped as a slurry underground, back into the mine cavities, which will then be sealed off. This is a very expensive and complex way of dealing with mine waste. There is a high risk that this plan will be abandoned because it is too costly or just won't work. The EIS doesn't address what will happen then. While they are working out how to do this mine waste will be stockpiled above ground, adding further to the dust problem.

7. Economics of the Mine Proposal

The proposed mine is relatively small, but will be extremely costly due to the groundwater issues, the limited amount of coal that will be extracted and the fact that around half the coal is cheap, thermal grade coal. The claimed royalties that the state would receive are tiny compared with the state's expenditure.

The price of coal is already in decline, and will most certainly reduce further in the future as world-wide demand for coal reduces in favour of renewable energy. It is very likely the mine will become uneconomic if it is allowed to proceed, which would result in the State government receiving no royalties at all and the very likely possibility that the mining company could simply abandon the project. It would be hard to chase the company's funds to South Korea. There are already 50,000 abandoned mines in Australia so no one can say this will not happen.

There is a huge risk that the government could be left with an expensive environmental disaster to try to repair or a permanent disaster that no one can fix. It is just not worth the risk of destroying our

environment and underground water reserves for a project that will deliver the NSW people little or no monetary returns.

Summary

If the proposed Hume Coal mine proceeds there is likely to be an environmental, social and economic disaster in the Southern Highlands. We just cannot risk destroying this beautiful area forever.

I therefore totally object to this proposed mine and ask the government to reject this proposal.

I have not made a reportable political donation in the last 2 years.

H. Attwood