



Kate Washington MP

Member for Port Stephens



30 January 2019

Mr Howard Reed
Director
NSW Department of Planning & Environment
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Mr Reed

RE: SUBMISSION REGARDING BOBS FARM SAND MINE PROJECT

I write regarding the proposed development by Ammos Resource Management Pty Ltd titled Bobs Farm Sand Mine Project (SSD-6395).

I have many concerns about the proposal, including its adverse impact on the neighbouring Bobs Farm Public School, its potential negative impact on other local industry, its direct impact on congestion on Nelson Bay Road, and its significant impact on the pristine natural environment of Port Stephens.

IMPACT ON BOBS FARM PUBLIC SCHOOL

Bobs Farm Public School recently celebrated its centenary of offering quality, local public schooling to the families of Bobs Farm.

The proposal as outlined by the proponent would encircle Bobs Farm Public School, creating a driveway on either side of this small country school and result in up to 180 truck movements travelling past the school every day of term.

This equates to one truck movement every three minutes or more traveling past the classroom while lessons are underway. The noise generated by these truck movements, as well as the noise from the operation to the mine, poses a substantial impediment to the learning environment of these students.

Parents of students at the school remain concerned that this development would negatively impact the educational outcomes and physical wellbeing of the students.

These truck movements also pose a hazard to students as they enter and exit the school. Across Port Stephens, students travel to school via school bus, private car, bicycle and on foot. The proposal will see students aged between 5 and 12 years old crossing roads and driveways

where a high volume of heavy vehicles will be moving. These truck movements pose a foreseeable risk to the safety of students as they enter and exit their school.

Parents have also reported to me their concern about the impact of silica dust from the sand mine. There is growing evidence of the impact of particulate pollution such as silica dust on respiratory health and the concern about these health impacts takes particular importance given the proximity of the primary school.

Bobs Farm Public School had just 36 students enrolled last year. Given the level of concern amongst the community about the potential impacts of proposed sand mine on the learning environment and children's health, parents are likely to be looking for alternative schooling.

I'm already aware of parents choosing to send their child to another school, with the prospect of a sand mine already being a deterrent to enrolment.

Any reduced enrolment at the school risks the ongoing viability of the small school. If Bobs Farm Public School were to close it would see an important local public school option lost, local jobs lost and break 100 years of the delivery of quality public education at the site.

For this reason alone, the sand mine should not be approved.

IMPACT ON NELSON BAY ROAD

Nelson Bay Road is a State Road which connects the Tomaree Peninsula to Newcastle and the broader Hunter area. This heavily used road between Stockton and Nelson Bay is the only access point by car for residents of the Tilligerry and Tomaree Peninsula.

The current proposal would see up to 180 additional trucks each day on Nelson Bay Road, at a maximum frequency of 18 trucks every hour.

These additional truck movements are detrimental to the local community both through the additional congestion they create as well as through the increased safety risk they pose for motorists.

Large sections of Nelson Bay Road remain single lane in both directions. Freedom of Information documents have shown that the next stage of the duplication of Nelson Bay Road was not due to start until 2021 and take over three years to complete. Even after that stage is completed, there are at least two remaining single lane sections of Nelson Bay Road which require duplication.

Even once further duplication of the next stage is completed, relief for motorists will be short lived if an additional 180 sand trucks increase the congestion on the remaining single lane sections of this road.

As a single lane road the addition of 180 sand trucks also poses an increased safety risk to other road users including motorists and cyclists.

My office has received regular complaints about the behaviour of drivers of existing sand trucks in the area, including reports of speeding, aggressive behaviour, disregard for the safety of cyclists, and compression breaking in residential areas.

The approval of an additional 180 truck movements on Nelson Bay Road is highly likely to exacerbate these existing concerns.

The impact of the additional 180 trucks onto Nelson Bay Road must be assessed in the context of the cumulative impact of truck movements from current sand mine operations and proposed future sand mine operations.

The residents of Port Stephens, particularly the Tomaree Peninsula, do not want the gateway to Port Stephens becoming a mining corridor.

IMPACT ON NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Port Stephens is renowned for its natural beauty and pristine waters, as well as its native wildlife. The proposed development presents a significant threat to the native flora and fauna of Port Stephens.

The proposal will result in the clearing of over 36 hectares, much of which is native bushland. The site forms part of a Lower Hunter Green Corridor which provides a continuous connection of native habitat from the Watagan National Park to the neighbouring Worimi National Park, through a collection of protected and privately owned properties.

This clearing will disrupt the Tomaree Peninsula's threatened koala habitat as well as other native wildlife. Port Stephens koala population is an iconic local species whose ongoing survival is under imminent threat.

It is important to note that the Port Stephens koala population have met the NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee's criteria to be listed as 'endangered', however due to a flawed change to NSW environment laws the species cannot officially be listed as 'endangered' as they were already listed as 'threatened'. In considering this matter I would hope the Department of Planning and Environment will consider the NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee's position that the Port Stephens koala population is 'endangered'.

The proposal involves the extraction of sand from up to 15 metres below the water table. The residents of Port Stephens are very aware of the importance of a clean ground water supply, given the PFAS contamination in the bore water supply in the nearby suburbs of Williamtown, Salt Ash and Fullerton Cove.

I understand that this site forms part of, or is adjacent to, the Stockton sandbeds catchment area. With changing climate patterns and the reduced access to drinking water due to the Williamtown PFAS contamination of surrounding Tomago sandbeds, access to high quality drinking water from the Stockton sandbeds is of vital importance to the future of the Lower Hunter region.

At the conclusion of the operation of this project the proponent intends to leave a 24.5 hectare void or dam. It is entirely inappropriate that any void be allowed to remain.

IMPACT ON TOURISM INDUSTRY

This proposed development includes the clearing of over 36 hectares of bushland adjacent to Nelson Bay Road, at the entrance to beautiful Port Stephens.

Port Stephens is a tourism destination. In peak months the population of the peninsular between Bobs Farm and Fingal Bay can triple in size.

The prosperity of this region relies in large part on the role of tourism operators and the drawcard of a pristine natural environment which includes the Port Stephen Marine Park, Tomaree National Park and Worimi National Park.

This proposal has the potential to seriously and negatively impact Port Stephens' local economy because of the land clearing at the entrance to our tourism destination and the increased volume of truck movements on Nelson Bay Road.

When assessing the economic benefits of the approval of this sand mine I would encourage the Department to also assess the negative economic impacts this approval would have on other sectors of the Port Stephens economy, especially tourism and hospitality.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT ON PORT STEPHENS

In my submission, I have not addressed the potential impact of the sand mine on residents' health as I will leave that to those qualified to comment. However, I am aware that it is a significant concern of residents, combined with the potential impact on quality of life.

For the reasons I have outlined above, I remain strongly of the view that it is an entirely inappropriate development at this location, that it is against the interests of the public, and it should not be approved.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kate Washington', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Kate Washington MP

Member for Port Stephens

Shadow Minister for the Hunter

Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education