

## *“Reclaiming our Valley”*

### Hunter Communities Network

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PO Box 14 Singleton 2330

Lauren Evans  
Assessment Planner  
Department of Planning and Environment  
GPO Box 39  
Sydney NSW 2001

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#### **Submission of Objection** Mt Owen Continued Operations Modification 2

The Hunter Communities Network is an alliance of community based groups and individuals impacted by the current coal industry and concerned about the ongoing rapid expansion of coal and coal seam gas exploration and mining in the region.

We strongly object to the proposed modification of the Mt Owen Continued Operations (the modification) for the following reasons:

##### 1. Air Quality

The air quality assessment fails to recognise the high levels of air pollution recorded at the Camberwell regional air quality monitor. This area of the Hunter is totally surrounded by opencut coal mining operations. These are the key source of dust pollution.

The assessment of fine particle pollution (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) is inadequate and does not account for existing high levels above the new national standards adopted in 2015.

This area of the Hunter Region is subject to unacceptably high levels of mine generated air pollution combined with power station and excess mine related traffic on the New England Highway. These cumulative impacts have not been assessed.

It is untenable for an increase in air pollution to be approved until 2037.

##### 2. Acquisition rights for Camberwell

The high levels of air pollution recorded at the Camberwell regional air quality monitor are a major threat to the remaining private residents at Camberwell. The modification proposes to increase mining impacts closer to Camberwell at the southern end of the pit and to continue mining to the north of Camberwell for an extended period of time.

The cumulative air quality impacts of this modification should trigger acquisition rights for Camberwell villagers. This is an important consideration particularly in light of the current application by Ashton Mine to have Camberwell acquisition rights from that project revoked.

Hunter Communities Network considers that any approval of increased mining activities in this area of the Hunter should provide acquisition rights for all remaining private residents after the application of a full social impact assessment.

### 3. No final voids

We are concerned that the resubmitted application for the modification outlines four scenarios for the final landform.

There should be no approval of final voids left in perpetuity in the Hunter landscape. The rehabilitation bond scheme does not include the costs of long term management of final voids.

If the operation cannot fund the backfilling of all voids, as has been required in the USA since 1975, then it is not economically viable and should not be approved.

### 4. Social and environmental impacts

The proposal to continue mining at the Mt Owen complex to extract a further 35 million tonnes of coal and keep 660 people in work for an additional 6 years is environmentally and socially unsustainable.

The impacts of climate change by 2030 could possibly render mining operations inoperable through lack of water, extremely high wind levels, bushfire and a range of other extreme scenarios that have not been factored into the assessment of the modification.

A transition in the Hunter is needed to encourage a diverse range of new industries to replace mining jobs. The development of a transition plan will be hindered by the continued expansion of the industry.

The key question is what will happen to the 660 employees after 2037. This problem must be solved before 2030, not prolonged by the approval of this proposal.

An increased production of carbon emissions up until 2037 is unacceptable and is not sustainable development.

Yours faithfully



Bev Smiles  
Convenor