

1. Minimal Community Consultation

On 29 April 2020 my wife and I received a letter from NSW Planning, Industry and Environment concerning the proposed tenfold expansion of the quarry at Howlong. In spite of the fact that we live in Howlong and are involved in the community, the letter was the first official information that we had received about the project. This fact calls into question the extent of community consultation about the project, the veracity of the findings from the apparent consultation with residents, and the degree to which the findings can be generalised as a legitimate view of community concerns relating to the proposed development.

2. Lack analysis and appropriate responses to community concerns

Furthermore, 'Part 11 Social Impact and Assessment' of the Quarry expansion submission to NSW Planning and Environment, does not really address community concerns. This section which should detail, analyse and address community concerns, is largely a descriptive account of the area, town, population, etc – the type of information which a junior researcher could easily goggle. The submission does not capture the high level of concern within the community of Howlong about the quarry expansion and how these concerns will be appropriately addressed.

In regard to community consultation, I note on the letter from NSW Planning and Environment that 'the Minister has not directed that a public meeting be held'. However, in view of the lack of community consultation to date and poor response to community concerns on the part of the project proponents, there is a clear need for a number of consultation meetings.

3. High risk to ground water and river water quality

The proposed tenfold expansion of the quarry will occur over existing water tables and beside the Murray river. Consequently, there is a high risk that water sources will be polluted in the normal quarry operations or due to accidental spills of fuel and like pollutants.

With respect to the adjacent Murray River, there is no surety that unintended spills of pollutants or floods will adversely affect the quality of the water in the river. In September / October 2016 significant quantities of water were required to be released from the Hume Weir which had reached capacity. As a result, there was unplanned flooding of farmland and recreational reserves along the river which destroyed facilities at Lions Park and Memorial Park in Howlong. The flooding also impacted adversely on water quality killing large quantities of native fish. Sadly, the non-native carp, the rats of the river, survived as they survive well in muddy water.

In a world where the climate has changed and former base-line climate data is no longer viable in accurately predicting climatic events, it is highly likely that an unforeseen floods or water releases from the Hume Weir will cause a breach of Quarry structures, pollute the river water, again damage marine life and compromise the quality of Howlong's town water supply.

4. Truck route negatively impacts upon residential areas.

As stated in the submission for the tenfold expansion of the quarry 'Part 1 Road and Transport Assessment Item 4.2':

Ninety-five percent of trucks from the quarry will travel through the main street of Howlong (Hawkins St.) and then turn south or north at the end of the shopping centre into Sturt St or along the Riverina Highway. The estimated daily increase of vehicles through the centre of town would be 13 light vehicles and 80 heavy trucks.

Eighty heavy trucks in a normal working day translates into one heavy quarry truck every 6 to 8 minutes an hour. Each of these heavy quarry trucks would travel along the main street of Howlong past the Primary School, past the Childcare Centre, past the town's recreational and sporting facilities (Lowe Square), past many residential dwellings and right through the middle of Howlong's shopping centre. This is highly unacceptable in a civilised society.

Increased air pollution and noise levels from trucks in residential areas

The additional number of trucks travelling through the centre of town will undeniably increase the level of noise and air pollution for adjacent residences, the primary school, the child care centre, and those using the towns recreational facilities. A Truck Bypass of Howlong is the only long-term solution. Moreover, a Bypass route already exists and is used by a number of truck operators.

Increased risk of accidents to pedestrians and vehicles

There are shops on both sides of the shopping centre in Hawkins Street, however there is no pedestrian crossing in town! It is important to note that recently the Federation Shire Council attempted to move the disabled parking from outside the pharmacy to further down Hawkins street because of the traffic issues and the limited size of the disabled parking space. The residents complained that the Council should instead widen the existing disabled parking space, add a ramp and establish a truck bypass around the town. In other words, fix the source of the problems. The Council has reached a compromise with the residents about enhancing the existing disabled parking space, but has not yet addressed the truck traffic issue in the shopping centre.

The demographic profile of Howlong shows a high number of residents who are either young or elderly. As such the main street (the proposed truck route) has numerous facilities frequented by elderly people with mobility devices and children on bikes. The Quarry expansion application fails to identify this matter, let alone provide strategies to address the safety issues which increased truck traffic will create in the main street.

The Quarry expansion application also fails to note that Howling is one of the exceptional growth centres in the Federation Shire, a rural shire in which a good number of towns have stagnant or decreasing populations.

Clearly the township of Howlong is not anti-development. However, residents recognise that development needs to occur in ways which ensure safety and maintain the existing feel of Howlong which attracts new residents and important developments.

5. Urgent need for a truck bypass around Howlong

The need for a truck bypass around Howlong has been raised in relation to many development proposals in Howlong. Moreover, a road detour already exists on the northern side of the town and takes the following route:

The Howlong-Kywong road joins the Riverina Highway on the north western side of Howlong and travels north past the rubbish tip. This road is already used by heavy trucks going to and from the Howlong Rubbish Transfer Station and those trucks going to and from the Quarry further along the Howlong-Kywong road.

A little past the rubbish tip there is a right hand turn from the Howlong-Kywong road into Drew lane. Drew lane travels in an easterly direction to join the Howlong -Goombarguana road which is a major road used by interstate trucking. At the Howlong -Goombarguana road, traffic can travel north towards Walbundrie, straight ahead towards Burrumbuttock, or south to join the Riverina Highway on the eastern side of Howlong. From the Riverina Highway intersection, the highway travels east straight past the entrance to Fraser's Sand and Gravel Quarry which is the subject of the current development application.

As previously stated, the roads in this route that detours the Howlong township are currently used by large trucks.

With appropriate signage, upgrades where necessary, and political goodwill, this route can easily become a designated truck bypass that loops around Howlong. A designated truck bypass will provide a long-term solution to the many issues associated with increasing truck traffic through the centre of town. A designated truck bypass will also be an effective way of balancing the need for development and rights of residents to live in a safe, non-polluted, noise limited township.