

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Re: Wongawilli Coal Mine Modification 2 Extension Project

Thankyou for the opportunity to make a submission.

I object to the application for an extension by Wollongong Coal Ltd's, Wongawilli Coal Mine premised as consistent with the original approval but is in fact made with the intention of paving the way for accessing coal for which they do not currently have approval. In substance then this is not an extension but an application for a new development by stealth, creating leverage for that future approval. It should be treated as an application for a new approval altogether.

I consider myself a person directly affected by the Project and consequently any decision you make in relation to it.

I write this in the hope that you will indeed hear that your decisions impact significantly on individuals and that we speak with "expertise" on our experience, that our reports of that experience are factual and not to be brushed aside as some in some way merely the ramblings of ill informed bleeding hearts.

The attitude of both politicians and senior bureaucrats over many years show an acceptance that industry advocates, despite their having conflicts of interest arising from their industry financial interests, are experts who can provide real information. At the same time, consumer and community advocates and individuals speaking for what they see and report of the same issues in question, are dismissed frequently as an invalid voice of their own experience, independent expert analysis and concerns.

I have no doubt there will be others who will make submissions with more technical detail on the issues but this is a report of lived experience and assessment of the risks and impacts raised by this Proposal.

As a person from rural New South Wales, who lives in Sydney but has an interest in property south east of Goulburn, I have experienced cost and loss of amenity due to climate change and Government economic, resource and environmental policies and decisions. The last two years have been particularly adverse.

It was sad to visit family in rural NSW experiencing such a severe drought. I do not recall the area being so barren and dust affected in all the long hot summers I lived through in the area. The fish kills in the Darling River are shocking against the remembered fishing trips to the river of my youth. Burrendong Dam, drowned farming land, was severely depleted and had not assured that towns downstream, such as Dubbo, had reliable water supply, let alone delivered on environmental water flows.

In Sydney, we abided by Sydney Water restrictions on use as the dam levels went down. We dutifully reduced our personal use and limited garden watering, carried watering cans with grey shower water, and siphoned grey washing water to try and keep the garden alive. In the meantime we paid increased water charges for the operation of the desalination plant.

The exceptionally hot and windy weather and dust storms impacted on our ability to go about our days productively. We spent more time closed behind blinds with fans running than we usually do. The trees on our property were water stressed and some have died as a result.

Then came the bush fires. We evacuated our rural property and had to remove goods from it as the Currowan Complex of fires hovered within a wind shift's easy reach through December 2019 and into February 2020, coming as close as two kilometres. We were lucky, it did not burn, but we were suspended, expecting it could go each time there was another day of hot windy weather. If it had, that would have destroyed twenty years of hard work and investment in recovery of eroded and degraded land and seen more soil loss and other debris flow into the Shoalhaven River in subsequent rain.

Meanwhile in Sydney, still under water restrictions, we now had seriously deteriorated air quality from not only dust but now smoke. This further impacted on our health and ability to go about our daily lives.

The rains came but that did not stop the water restrictions, only recently lifted. The continued water restrictions and the desalination plant being kept on stand-by was explained as arising from the possible contamination of Sydney's drinking water by bush fire ash washed into the supply.

Only die-hard climate change deniers fool themselves climate change had nothing to do with the drought, the bushfires, and the record hot temperatures and heat waves. Only those same deniers fool themselves that fossil fuel emissions at all stages of their mining, transport and use wherever occurring, have nothing to do with climate change.

There are others who seem to think that water is an infinite resource as well, where it can be stored or used without some loss being incurred elsewhere without change. Or they appear to think that desalination comes without an environmental price to pay, ignoring the energy production necessary to drive the plant or the increased salinity of the discharge from the plant.

Others appear to believe that you can destroy one unique swamp and simply offset it by one, oh, somewhere else and that will be all right, everything will balance. This fails to take into account, both swamps have a role, both have unique qualities, and probably both need keeping for the welfare of a healthy, bushfire resistant environment.

Meanwhile Government continues to accept and encourage the growth of the Sydney population both in density and area, allowing still more bush to be cleared for development. More people mean more people relying on the water supply that was not, apparently, adequate in 2019-20 for the city.

This application alleges that due to the nature of the mining, the significant swamp in this area will not be impacted, nor will the Lake Avon, or Gallahers Creek.

And yet this proposal, seeking approval, is for coal, a fossil fuel will place demands on water use and place both environmental water (swamps and streams) and city water resources at risk.

The proposed 'extension' will actually go under one the water storage dams for the Greater Metropolitan area, Lake Avon and a significant creek bringing inflow to that dam, Gallahers Creek. Most developed nations do not allow mining under their catchments. Despite all the estimates and proposed margins, things go wrong. How can this possibly be slipped through as a mere extension.

It is startling, that it is still considered acceptable to contemplate the possibility of surface slumping, destroying the integrity of water courses and water retention in the environment as insignificant, minor, not substantial or other minimising words. Further, that if some damage is done, mere (inadequate) remedial financial contributions will be good enough, assuming for a moment that the mining company will have funds to pay, or still exist. Past experience indicates that whatever potential damage is predicted, it will in fact be exceeded and that rock structures may be damaged. The underlying fracturing of the rock structures and the changes that causes to underground water flow and loss, is unacceptable given what we now know about water and water shortage.

There is no reasonable alternative if we get this wrong. It cannot be put back together again. We cannot go on damming more valleys, or raising the walls and drowning more of valleys already dammed or, one might say, damned. It is unacceptable to consider raising the wall of Warragamba Dam (already affected anyway by changing rainfall patterns according to news reports in recent years). That would inundate yet more world heritage area and cause additional loss of cultural heritage.

Climate change and water shortage have many inputs but each incremental increase adds to what will be large changes to our world, security, peace and access to food, housing and quality of life generally. Even if

our coal is used overseas, those emissions affect the way oceans heat up, currents change, ice melts, oceans rise, monsoons happen longer, later or don't, and rains do not happen, harvests do not happen, fish die, forests stress and burn. Meanwhile people are injured and die fighting fires and, as many are volunteers, are off work, property and infrastructure are damaged and destroyed, people are without homes, and businesses are ruined (ask people down the south coast after recent bushfires). The cost of rebuilding will be more under new regulations and under prediction of increased extreme weather events. Insurance will become prohibitive or just not available.

It is not enough to say a few jobs will be created or protected although the people immediately affected will feel it. It is not enough to say Government will get royalties or taxes. These amounts will never balance out the costs the rest of us, and our children, pick up in the ensuing years from the remedial costs and disruption.

We need to be wiser with what we already have, reduce our use and abuse of our resources and environment. In particular we should avoid facilitating yet further fossil fuel emissions and water use and risk to water resources, associated with fossil fuel mining.

In the interim, \$700million in Australian coal had been sitting in ships waiting and hoping to be offloaded in China, a country that says it is moving to zero emissions in 2060 and plans to prioritise its internal resources. While those ships have finally been allowed to dock and unload for humanitarian reasons, it is not clear that previous supply levels to China will recommence.

So how is the Department intending to count the costs for our children and their children into the future from the damage caused to long-term resources of climate, environment and water, safe and productive food production, loss of heritage, wilderness and environmental amenity, and political and security instability both internationally and locally?

Who is going to be there for my daughter, who lives with disability and will be vulnerable to a world in which there is pressure on resources as basic as clean air, water and food, a degraded environment and quality of life and loss of security?

Do not be mistaken, your decision affects me and mine directly, now and into the future. You might be persuaded to think that it is merely incremental, but it is an increment we, including me and mine, you and yours, and even those few to benefit from any jobs associated with the project, cannot afford.

Recommended:

The application should not be approved