

Attention: Planning NSW, Major Projects

Re: “Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project”

14th March 2021

To whom it may concern

We are writing to express our concern about the extension to the Mt Pleasant Mine project, both in timescale and in land area impacted.

The impact on the Upper Hunter Region from open cut coal mining is already enormous. Visually both on land and from the air or in satellite imagery the area covered by coal mines where there was once agricultural land or even communities, keeps expanding.

The voids are now left behind at the cessation of mining, leaving great scars on the landscape. There are risks to food production, to water resources, to air quality and to generation of weather systems.

At our home the nearby P10 air quality alert on Gundibri Station is triggered often when there is an easterly wind blowing. We are afraid of the long term impact on ourselves and our family and on future generations living here. We have already nursed our daughter through chronic health complaints in her childhood, she is part of our succession plan and I hope she will have the option of moving back to the district in later life without risking exacerbations of her lung complaints.

We rely on rainwater for drinking, collecting it from the roof, we are concerned at what is contained in the dust which blows in from the coal mine turning the residue in house gutters black, instead of red like our topsoil, as it was in previous years.

We and many of our neighbours now see light from the mines reflected in the night sky where it used to be black, lit only by stars.

In our district in recent years we have endured an exceptionally severe three year drought, severe storms, record breaking summer temperatures, the massive Sir Ivan Bushfire, the 2020 bushfire season especially the Gospers Mountain Fire and Goulburn River National Park fires. Anyone who lives on the land cannot help but be involved in the debate about climate. At the very least the radiant heat from deforested coal mine areas to the East and West of the Merriwa Plateau seems to exacerbate and prolong heat waves.

Many times we watch a band of rain approach our farm only to have it disappear when it approaches the mined areas, leaving rain to the North and South of us but leaving us in a “rain shadow”. After the impact of the Sir Ivan fire this effect was even more marked. We believe we should be planting more trees and grasses, not denuding the landscape and leaving large holes in the ground which will never regenerate topsoil. The efforts to screen voids during and after mining with “rehabilitated” spoil mounds are only a visual solution which does not recognise the complex effects on land, flora, fauna, weather and humans, an “out of sight out of mind” measure which would work for one void but not for dozens!

Theses are local arguments but the wider impacts on the global environment and climate change should not be ignored. It is simply not responsible to humanity to keep expanding coal mines. The coal industry seems to be under economic threat from changing global values. It would be better to gradually introduce a diversity of industries in the Hunter Valley, with the option for new training and new types of employment for the people living here, especially young people, instead of trying to lock them into a single way of life relying on a single industry.

The towns of Singleton and Muswellbrook have changed beyond recognition in the 23 years I have lived near Merriwa. Now the town of Aberdeen and Scone are under threat, with a breach in the hills between two major valleys being planned. The types of soil in use for agriculture in these areas is irreplaceable, highly productive and rare in Australia. The Hunter River supplies water to industries, towns and residences all the way from Scone to the coast at Newcastle. The underground aquifers supply even more people and industries and could be irreparably damaged. We need to use natural resources sustainably and responsibly and take into account all users of these resources when making decisions on behalf of one industry.