Martins Creek Quarry Project

EPBC # 2016/7725

Application # SSD 6612

I am making this submission in opposition to the Martins Creek Quarry project based on the current proposed method of transporting up to 500,000t per annum via substandard rural and local road system and up to 600,000t per annum via an existing rail spur and loading facility that is connected to a soon to be below capacity North Coast rail corridor and Main Northern Rail Line.

This objection is based on road user safety, the cost of ongoing maintenance to an already extremely poor road surface and pavement that would be borne by two local LGAs and the noise impact to rural and urban residences as well as commercial areas in Paterson and East Maitland.

Road user safety is compromised in the areas of;

- Increased numbers of truck movements on a road where construction standards and safety issues such as site distances, curvature and sealed shoulder widths are acknowledged to have been outdated and historical
- Sealed road shoulders are minimal, not contiguous and drop to grassed shoulder verges that are extremely problematic and dangerous for recreation cyclists
- Interaction of increased heavy vehicles with bus stoppages at non designated points, without the potential to move off carriage widths, to pick up school children
- Interaction of increased heavy vehicles with garbage pickup vehicles in areas as outlined above
- Increased truck movements through the already near capacity intersection at Pitnacree Rd/Melbourne Street in peak am & pm times

Ongoing maintenance

- The increased funding impost, as determined in the Traffic Impact Assessment of $110,367 per annum for 12.75km of roadway within the Maitland City Council LGA and $51,571 per annum for 15.7kms of roadway within the Dungog Shire LGA. Dungog LGA is recognised as having if not the greatest, certainly one of the highest proportion of rural roads versus urban roads to maintain
- The costs quoted above obviously do not allow for more major upgrades to improve road safety in the areas of road widening and realignment

Noise Impact

- The ongoing unmitigated truck noise along a ribbon corridor through areas of rural, rural residential, urban residential and commercial use

The proposed road haulage with all the issues outlined above, is proposed along with a rail haulage on the North Coast rail corridor of up to 600,000t per annum. The North Coast line however has current capacity and a soon to be realised increased capacity to transport all of the quarried product.

The North Coast Rail line, in contrast to the proposed road haulage route, is government owned and maintained. Also, ongoing royalties accrued from the quarrying proposal could and should go directly to the maintenance of this infrastructure which has had substantial maintenance and improvements over recent years and will have increased capacity because of the inland rail currently under construction and scheduled for completion in 2026. The other component of the rail haulage route, the Main Northern Rail corridor, will experience increased capacity because of the decreasing coal transport on the line as a consequence of a worldwide reduction in the use of fossil fuels. In addition to this, is the announcement that Transport for NSW is consulting on a recommended corridor option for the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor which will provide for a future dedicated freight rail line between Fassifern and Hexham, bypassing the Newcastle urban area.

From an environmental management perspective rail transport will reduce noise and air pollution.

North Coast Line Improvements in recent years

- Resleepered with concrete sleepers
- Upgraded signals
- New loops passing lanes
- New overbridges
- Curve easing

Main Northern Rail Line

- Decreasing use due to ongoing reduction in world wide coal markets
- Future Lower Hunter Freight corridor to reduce interface with passenger trains in the Newcastle urban area

Inland Rail

- Completion in 2026
- Move freight between Brisbane and Melbourne therefore removing substantial freight trains from North Coast line therefore increasing available capacity

Environmental Issues

- Limiting transport of quarry material to the rail line would restrict noise emissions to an existing freight transport noise source that will experience reduced noise levels, compared to the current situation, because of a reduction in total freight traffic. The noise reduction over time would exceed that potentially added by the increased number of quarry movements. This contrasts with the noise resulting from 280 truck movements Monday to Friday along a 28.5km road corridor through Dungog and Maitland.
- The environmental mitigation principle that " impacts are best managed at source" could be achieved at the train loading facility on site where specifically locomotives would be opposite houses in Station Street for a shorter period of time and the ease of constructing noise attenuation barriers could be undertaken, if required
- Reduction in carbon emissions

The aspects outlined above are informed by the revision of the specialist studies;

- Rail logistics Options Report
- Traffic Impact Assessment
- Pavement Condition Analysis
- Noise Impact Assessment
- Economic Assessment

In addition to the specific points made previously, I do not believe that an economic assessment of a single option, that being the preferred option is sufficient for a project of this magnitude. I would think that an analysis of several options including those for solely road transport and solely rail transport would provide a more creditable project position to be assessed.

Also, because of the changing capacities on all the affected corridors, there would be greater potential to obtain or develop a depot for unloading trains and then loading trucks within the industrial area of the Newcastle Port. The advantage of moving freight from this precinct is the existence of Heavy Vehicle routes with pre assessed environmental issues and management provisions in place. The identification of a depot facility with capacity at Glenlee, transport cost competitive against Southern Highlands Rail Options aside, has been outlined in the Plateway report. The economic aspects then need to be assessed.

In conclusion I believe that in consideration of the environmental aspects noted, road safety and maintenance cost perspective and an overarching Intergenerational position, the movement of all quarried product from Martins Creek Quarry, if proven to meet all other environmental and legislative criteria, should only be moved by rail.

A final decision, as always, will be determined by weight of environmental impact versus overall economic benefit most importantly to the local community. It is the local community that will then live with the ongoing impacts and the controlled management thereof, or not, by the proponent and adequate administration by local and state authorities.