

I **strongly OPPOSE** Daracon's amended development proposal for greatly increased extraction from the Martins Creek quarry and, in particular, the excessive heavy truck traffic that this will generate. The truck traffic will have a serious and significant detrimental impact on the social amenity of the local communities along and around the haul routes. I believe the current approval conditions, established by court decision, should remain.

In the last decade, and particularly the last five years, the Australian community has placed an increasingly higher value on living outside major cities and urban centres. This has particularly come about with modern internet communications and the extension of the National Broadband Network (NBN) to rural areas, including the Paterson Valley. These technological improvements in communication have enabled people to live and work remotely in rural communities and benefit from the rural lifestyle amenity these areas offer. The continuing Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 has placed accelerated demand for this type of lifestyle living and this is evidenced in the Paterson Valley by an increased tempo in rural residential subdivision around Paterson, Vacy, Martins Creek and Gresford. The amenity offered by rural lifestyle living is a prominent and promoted attribute of the area – something highlighted by Dungog Shire's vision for the shire as *"An area where rural character, community safety and lifestyle are preserved"* and by the tag line on welcome signs to all of the shire's villages *"Life as it should be"*. **I believe the Daracon proposal will have a substantial and long-term adverse impact on the preservation of these lifestyle values.**

Many social commentators have suggested that Covid-19 has forever changed the nature of work in Australia with more people able to integrate their work with their home life and other lifestyle choices. If this is correct, the recent growth in lifestyle residential developments in the Paterson valley is certain to continue, and probably accelerate, over the planning horizon of the Daracon proposal.

Martins Creek quarry was originally established by a former NSW government rail authority to provide railway ballast. It is immediately adjacent to the main north rail line and a loading siding into the quarry enabled ballast to be transported by rail to various railway work sites. In this operating context, the quarry had little adverse impact on the local communities of the Paterson Valley and Maitland. With the sale of the quarry to private operators, the operating context of the quarry has changed to one of providing construction materials and transport of the material is by road. This has placed considerable strain on roads and bridges that were not constructed to handle high volumes of heavy vehicle traffic and has had an adverse impact on the communities along those roads.

It is somewhat ironic that the Daracon proposal is being considered in the context of a State Significant project. The Martins Creek quarry was not considered to be significant by State authorities when it was sold by the former State Rail Authority (SRA). Extraction for rail ballast had diminished to a trickle and it has rarely been used as a sustained, long-term, source of ballast for NSW Railcorp or the Australian Rail Track Corporation since that initial sale. In that light, it can scarcely be considered to have demonstrated State significance in the period since the sale by the then SRA. As far as being a source of construction material, there are other operating quarries that can provide these materials for development projects in the region which scarcely makes this quarry unique or significant for that purpose.

While the array of technical reports commissioned by Daracon and Umwelt address various engineering and technical issues such as road damage, quarry access, Gostwyck bridge integrity,

noise amelioration, **they do not go any way towards addressing the social issues imposed by the proposal on a growing population of residents.** A large proportion of these residents lived in the area when the quarry served mainly the railway and so were not affected by heavy truck traffic. The growing population of more recent residents have chosen to live in this area for its lifestyle benefits – benefits that largely centre on being away from the intensity of urban dwelling and industrial disturbances. Daracon's proposal with its reliance on truck transport superimposes the urban and industrial problems back on both these groups of residents. **The growth in heavy truck traffic associated with the Daracon proposal is simply not compatible with the lifestyle and amenity expectations of this growing community.**

As mentioned earlier, the Paterson Valley is an attractive rural location and as such is now generating significant growth in lifestyle rural-residential development around its villages of Paterson, Vacy, Martins Creek and Gresford. This growth itself brings with it significant increases in ordinary traffic volumes from a larger population as well as growing residential construction and service delivery traffic. This means allowing the foreshadowed heavy truck traffic from Daracon's operations on what are essentially very basic, and generally low standard, rural roads potentially creates a more hazardous road environment for the residents of the area.

The primary objective of this proposal is simply business growth and profit for one individual business, Daracon. The proposal completely overlooks its adverse impacts on the social amenity of a large and growing resident community. Sound planning decisions must be as much about these social considerations as about the relentless pursuit of business growth.

While it is not uncommon for communities to object to development proposals that carry adverse impacts, many such proposals also provide direct benefits to the affected community through spending with local businesses etc. **This is not the case with Daracon's proposal.** Daracon is a business essentially headquartered and located outside the Dungog LGA as are most of its employees. Its activity at the quarry brings little, if any, direct business and economic benefit to this area yet its residents have to bear the significant long-term (ie 25 years) adverse effects of the quarry operations and hugely increased heavy vehicle traffic to the safety of their rural roads and their rural lifestyle amenity and liveability.

I live on a property on Dungog Road on the direct haul route to the quarry. Over the last 30 years I have witnessed and directly experienced the consequences of the change in the quarry operations from a rail ballast quarry to a construction material quarry under private operators Metromix and, most recently, Daracon. In particular, I have witnessed the massive increase in heavy truck traffic over these years. The trucks have got bigger and changed from single rigid trucks in the early years of truck movement of quarry product to now almost exclusive use of rigid trucks with dog trailers.

Rigid trucks with dog trailers are massively more unsuited than trucks without trailers to transport through residential areas, the village of Paterson and on surrounding rural roads. These truck-trailer combinations are extremely noisy, especially when empty. The empty dog trailer is a massive metal sound box that greatly amplifies the sounds that it generates. The trailer moves somewhat independently from the towing vehicle resulting in almost continuous amplified metallic rattling from its flexible components (trailer couplings, dust covers, opening tailgates etc), suspension and linkage with the towing vehicle.

The most significant adverse impact on our amenity occurred between the end of 2013 and throughout 2014 when Daracon had the contract to supply rail ballast for the \$100m ARTC Rail Relief Road project at Hexham. This entailed extra noise and dust nuisance from additional blasting and crushing at the quarry to almost continuous truck traffic. The additional crushing plant was so noisy that even our visitors commented on the continuous noise level. One morning, I waited for a “convoy” of 15 trucks to pass my gate before I could exit onto Dungog Road. It was later revealed that Daracon operated well outside its consent conditions to supply this contract. This contempt for the operating conditions and for local community to secure the lucrative contract suggests to me that Daracon cannot be trusted to operate with the best interests of the local community.

In the past, the truck operations have abused conditions. While the quarry had curfew hours that did not allow trucks to load until after 6.00 am, trucks would pass my property from around 5.00 am in order to queue at the quarry for the 6.00 am start. As there is a slight downhill section in front of my property, most of these trucks would be compression braking. Passing my property at 5.00 am meant these trucks would have been passing through the Maitland residential areas of Lorn, Bolwarra and Bolwarra Heights at around 4.30. Some years later, Dungog Council was able to stop trucks travelling through Paterson until after 8.00 am and, despite Daracon’s objections, this was the start of a minor, yet greatly appreciated, improvement in amenity for local residents.

I note that it is proposed that trucks will not be permitted to enter the quarry until 7.00 am and not travel through Paterson before 6.45 am. I also note that 10 trucks will be able to load after 6.00 pm and park in the quarry overnight in order to be able to leave at 7.00 am the following day. **Really, this is just tinkering with the fringes of the issue of increased truck traffic overall.** The problems of up to 40 truck movements an hour throughout the day will still exist and, as the rural residential population of the area grows, so will the adverse impact of the amenity and lifestyle of the residents, regardless of the time of day. Furthermore, a 7.00 am start will still mean multiple trucks passing through the narrow streets of Paterson village from 7.00 am to 8.30 am when several high school buses are loading in the village to take students to public and private high schools in Dungog and Maitland. Similarly, trucks will be passing through the village in the afternoon as the buses return students from these centres. It is not uncommon to see many students congregating around the cafés at the Gresford Road/King Street/Duke Street intersection in the afternoon. This intersection is narrow and requires the quarry trucks to make a 90 degree turn in both directions – hardly a safe situation.

As I noted earlier, the Paterson Valley is now experiencing rapid rural residential development around its villages. Many of these residents work in Maitland and beyond. As a result, the local roads are now seeing growth in commuter traffic in the early morning and evening. The concentration of trucks travelling to and from the quarry around the 7.00 am start will conflict with the morning peak of this commuter traffic. The same applies to the evening peak of residents returning to the valley.

The truck route through Paterson village follows a route established in the horse and cart era. It is narrow and lined with houses and small retail and hospitality businesses and has a blind narrow corner on a crest at the Prince Street/Duke intersection and the narrow 90-degree corner at the Gresford Road/King Street/Duke Street intersection. With up to 40 trucks per hour, the Daracon proposal essentially turns the main throughfare through the rural village of Paterson into an industrial truck route. Clearly, **the main haul route through Paterson Village is totally unsuited to**

the high volume of heavy vehicle traffic proposed by Daracon and Umwelt. With the growth in the residential population in the surrounding areas, use of this road as a high-volume, heavy-vehicle haul route through Paterson - a small, unspoiled, rural village - is unsustainable over the 25-year life of the Daracon proposal. This is so, regardless of the band-aid traffic and road “improvements”, suggested by the proponents.

In addition, the village of Paterson has seen business growth in recent years with new chemist and doctor’s surgery in King Street, adjacent to the truck route. Together with growth in other businesses such as the Post Office, which has seen a significant growth in parcel collection with the increased popularity of on-line shopping and the three nearby cafes and pub experiencing “café-culture” growth with local residents and visitors, the village is experiencing light traffic growth and parking congestion. In particular, parking around the narrow 90-degree corner at the Duke Street, Gresford Road and King Street intersection reduces the trafficable road width at this corner – a corner which the heavy trailer-towing trucks moving to and from the quarry must negotiate, often requiring more than a single lane width. With the foreshadowed number of truck movements, it is likely that quarry trucks travelling in opposite directions will meet at this intersection, possibly several times each day.



While it may be possible to marginally improve conditions for trucks at this intersection by prohibiting parking and possibly adding a concrete median (as suggested by a technical report), these moves would substantially erode the current social fabric of the village. This intersection is at the social and business hub of the village. The effect of 40 trucks per hour passing within metres of the three popular cafes (Country Café, Paterson Service Station café, CBC B&B café) as well as the Post Office and service station would be highly detrimental to the amenity these venues currently offer the local community, tourists and visitors. With the continuing growth in residential and associated traffic in Paterson Valley, **the foreshadowed increase in heavy quarry trucks negotiating this corner alongside other traffic can only be regarded as dangerous, irresponsible and detrimental to the social amenity that the village now offers.**

The northern road access (ie from the direction of the quarry) to Paterson is also proving to be something of an accident black spot and further illustrates the issues associated with using this rural road as a major heavy-vehicle haul route. This access is characterised by a controlled level crossing

on the main north rail line. Vehicles travelling into Paterson and queued at the closed level crossing are totally concealed from further approaching traffic by a crest on a curve just 75 metres before the level crossing. In the last 18 months, there have been four accidents at this site, mainly as a result of approaching vehicles being unaware of the vehicles queued at the intersection beyond the crest. The location is also complicated by the intersection with Webbers Creek Road located on the crest.

The main access route to the quarry from Paterson is along Gresford Road and Dungog Road. Dungog Road crosses the Paterson River via the single-lane Gostwyck Bridge constructed in 1928. This bridge is a pinch point on the route to and from the quarry and, as a single-lane bridge, requires one direction of traffic to give way to traffic travelling in the opposite direction. At present, a “give way” sign directs traffic approaching from the quarry side to give way. The “give way” is positioned after a blind right hand corner



on a 50-metre steep narrow descending approach to the actual bridge deck. This arrangement is perilous enough for light traffic – requiring laden heavy vehicles to stop and give way with such a limited sight distance on a downhill grade to the actual bridge is dangerous and undesirable. Greatly increasing heavy vehicle traffic at this pinch point must increase the probability of an accident. In July 2015, a car approaching the bridge from Paterson was forced to reverse off the bridge to make way for a truck entering from the other direction. The reversing vehicle left the road and rolled down the embankment of the Paterson-side bridge approach. The driver was fortunate to escape with only minor injuries.

I note too that the technical report suggests that a claimed existing 40kph speed limit on the bridge and its approaches be maintained. I don't know where this information comes from - currently, there is no sign-posted speed limit on bridge or its approaches with the road on both sides of the bridge sign posted with 80kph speed limits. This signals to all drivers, of trucks and light vehicles alike, that the speed limit on the bridge is 80kph. So, the suggestion in Daracon's supporting documentation that there is a safe speed limitation of 40kph on this bridge is completely false. The technical report also suggests improvements to bridge approaches but there is no indication or commitment from Daracon that these improvements will ever be done.

If this proposal goes ahead it will be yet another example of ordinary citizen's and resident's concerns being sacrificed to the commercial interests of big business and an erosion of a well-balanced planning process in New South Wales that appropriately considers views and interest of local communities and the social impacts on those communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my views.

