

Shenhua Watermark Planning Assessment Commission Hearing Thursday 11th December 2014

My name is Robert Monteath and I am an owner of Monteath and Powys which is a land surveying and town planning business with offices in Newcastle and Gunnedah. I support the approval of the Shenhua coal mine. I have been involved in the coal industry in the Gunnedah area for the past 35 years. Coal mining in the region is not new but to date less than 1% of the combined areas of Gunnedah & Narrabri Council regions has been subject to coal mining.

The Department of Planning and the previous planning assessment commission has recommended the approval of the Shenhua mine subject to 51 strict environmental conditions. There are a further 11 conditions regarding the reporting & auditing of the performance of these environmental conditions.

85% of the coal from this project will be used as coking coal as it has a very high energy component. I know a bit about coking coal because for the first 46 years of my life I lived, went to school, played sport and worked within a few kilometres of the coke ovens at the Newcastle BHP steelworks. In 1915 the reason BHP built the steelworks in Newcastle was because the hinterland has the best coal in Australia to be made into coke.

What is coke - other than being a black fizzy drink?

Coke is produced when very high grade coal - coking coal- is baked in an oven. Just like baking wood to make charcoal. Then the coke is burnt to provide the extreme heat needed to turn iron ore into steel.

During its 85 year life the steelworks in Newcastle provided steel for the growth and prosperity of Australia. This steel was made into Ford and Holden cars, tractors, harvesters and other farming machinery. Also in Newcastle, BHP had a subsidiary company called Australian Wire Industries which made fencing wire, barbed wire, star pickets as well as the electrical cables that hang from power poles.

I endured living within a few kilometres of a steelworks producing far more noise & dust than the Shenhua coal mine will ever produce. The good people in the Gunnedah region benefitted from the products of coking coal. You had electricity delivered to your homes, businesses and farms on BHP electrical wires, you drove cars, tractors and harvesters made from BHP steel. Your crops were transported for export in steel rail wagons and running on steel rail tracks which were made in Newcastle. The wire used to build and mend fences on your farms came from Newcastle.

Coking coal is needed to support the life to which we have become accustomed. I do not say this lightly. The cold beer poured in this club comes out of a stainless steel tap, the coffee you enjoy at the Bitter Suite cafe is made by a stainless steel espresso machine, a McDonalds hamburger is made in a stainless steel kitchen, at home you eat a steak with a stainless steel steak knife and wash up in a stainless steel kitchen sink. All because coking coal is mined.

Next time you use an oven, a washing machine, a harvester, a tractor, fix a fence, hang washing on a wire line, or get in and drive one of the many four wheel drives parked outside please acknowledge that you can only do these things because of the mining of coking coal.

If people want to continue to farm the land around Gunnedah or live in Gunnedah, they need steel which needs coking coal.

Some people may be of the view that they don't want this coal mine in their backyard. Well for 46 years I had a steelworks in my backyard and the people in this room have enjoyed the benefits of the steel produced in my backyard. So I respectfully say to those people who believe they are going to be directly affected by the noise & dust from the Shenhua mine, that, if you want to enjoy the benefits of steel you also need to be prepared to share the angst that goes into making steel.

Robert Monteath
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