

20th November 2017
"Wahroonga"
Bindera, 2422

NSW Planning Assessment Commission
Level 3, 201 Elizabeth Street
Sydney, 2000

Rocky Hill Coal Project (SSD 5156), Stratford Extension Project MOD (SSD 4966 MOD 1)

Attention: Commission Secretariat

We appreciate the opportunity to present my views on the above project to the NSW Planning Assessment Commission.

My wife and I are Gloucester residents of some 17 years after relocating from Sydney in late 2002. Our home and property lies on the Barrington River, to the west of Gloucester, beyond the bounds of the Gloucester vale coal seam exploration and mining. At the time of re-location (tree change), we diligently researched Gloucester and developed a clear appreciation of the rich coal seam beneath the valley and saw it as an opportunity for the future of Gloucester and its surrounds. For this very reason we chose not to evaluate cheap properties in the Avon river precinct.

Gloucester is a diverse township that has evolved over time as a variety of opportunities past and present waxed and waned. Gloucester's rich tapestry of diversity is clear, with commercial interests in agriculture (dairy, beef, wine and other boutique farming enterprises), health, education, child care, resources, engineering, construction, transport, logging, support services, diverse recreation facilities that include an aerodrome, hospitality, tourism and many others.

We are passionate about the future of Gloucester and whilst my wife and I are now in a late 60s, we currently enjoy the close proximity of one of our children, partner and grand children who live and enjoy life in the Gloucester township.

When we arrived in 2002, mining further down the Gloucester valley was in full swing. There were Toyota, Holden and Ford dealerships and a distinct air of optimism. Over previous decades Gloucester had proudly kept pace with other progressive regional towns and real estate prices had doubled each ten years or so. It was a vibrant township with modest incomes, secure employment and low social welfare demands.

Fast forward to Gloucester 2017, where largely due to flagging economic and residential property value; one of the very few growth industries and employers is social welfare. In tandem with Gloucester's excellent facilities, location and climate it has become a low rent haven; a perfect storm for welfare recipients. It is no longer the same optimistic and vibrant community that welcomed us in 2002.

A viable extraction industry and flow on jobs is a *shot in the arm* that Gloucester simply cannot ignore as it plots its future into the mid 2000's.

Commentary on the DP&E assessment

It appears that the DP&E assessment rejects this project on a number of grounds (listed below), **despite** the project achieving compliance for all non-discretionary standards of Clause 12AB of the mining SEPP.

We find this a perplexing and concerning issue which must ring alarm bells for any law abiding business going about its business activities in a legislated framework.

1. Proposed land use conflicts with existing established land uses, in particular rural-residential and tourism land uses

The project affords little impact on agricultural use and agricultural productivity during the life of the mine. The continued operation of the Speldon Dairy during the project's life demonstrates this simple fact. Agricultural land in a coal rich environment is inherently low fertility; however, it is demonstrated by DPI NSW that rehabilitated mining land returns to greater productivity than that of its native state. See <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/media-centre/releases/2017/grazing-study-shows-positive-results-for-rehabilitated-mine-land>.

9 Jun 2017- Grazing study shows positive results for rehabilitated mine land

The Department of Primary Industries' (DPI) three and half year study of beef grazing on rehabilitated mine pastures has confirmed growth of improved pastures provides increased livestock productivity compared to original native pastures.

The Forbesdale and Jacks Road residents, who might be most affected by noise, pollution and visual impacts are largely located between or adjacent to the busy Sydney Brisbane rail link and the Bucketts Way arterial corridors.

These two areas offer cheap acreage living of appeal to a wide variety of residents.

Noise dust, air and visual pollution from these major transport arteries are not assessed and this obvious fact is also ignored by local residents protesting the mines location. It seems to me that this is a case of the pot calling the kettle ... black.

As time moves on, the largely imaginary threat of loss of amenity, property de-valuation and lifestyle will quietly fade away as new residents move in and appreciate Gloucester for what it is; not for what it wasn't; whilst contributing enthusiastically to Gloucester's diverse social fabric.

The following images captured from Google earth, show the Jacks Road residential development area adjacent to the railway and industrial area and the Forbesdale road and rail corridors, including a train movement.



Jacks Road area



Forbesdale area

It is a fact of life that rural environments offer many wonderful lifestyle benefits; however this also coincides with a number of inherent risks and hazards. Airborne pollens and irritants from

predominant ryegrass and kikuyu pastures and the rampant spread of introduced narrow leaf privet along our waterways induce high levels of hay fever and associate allergic responses including asthma.

Agricultural burns and bushfires are another frequent event from spring to autumn in the Gloucester Vale. On the last day of the PAC hearing in Gloucester, Wednesday 15th November, we took the enclosed photograph looking north from the outskirts of town. This is a typical scene at this time of year and as the wind generally drops off and reverses direction over night, it brings a thick blanket of smoke to the valley.



Should any mine produce this gross level of harmful emissions it would be shut down by authorities immediately, pending an enquiry; yet it happens everyday of summer in Gloucester, as both planned and unplanned fire events occur.

The open cut metallurgical coal mine offers Gloucester valuable tourism potential. Basic population growth bolsters local tourism as a matter of course. The mine will directly provide opportunities to attract international tourism through technical site visits. And it provides the potential for visitation by everyday tourists who might be wondering what part metallurgical coal (low-sulphur, low-ash coal) plays in steel production.

The Hunter Valley clearly demonstrates the harmonious and symbiotic relationship of rural tourism and mining activities. It is a model upon which Gloucester, with its long list of impressive scenic attractions and services can adopt for its own exciting and sustainable future.

2. It is incompatible with the underlying aims and objectives of the strategic land use zonings of the Gloucester Local Environmental Plan to protect the scenic amenity of Gloucester township and the broader Gloucester Valley by retaining scenic and rural surroundings for the town.

This mine cannot seriously impact the scenic amenity of the Gloucester Township nor the broader Gloucester Valley. The majestic beauty of Gloucester is far greater than the modest impact of one small mine. The Gloucester Vale is already home to mines with much closer

proximity to homes and the major arteries of the Gloucester valley. The current mining impacts whilst visible are neither threatening nor an impediment to the attractiveness or scenic amenity of the greater Gloucester region.

The application states:

*Considering land uses, in 2018-19 around 335 ha of land will be used for mining purposes with an additional 267 ha of land being used for environmental offsets. Over time, the precise use of land will change with the area used for mining increasing to around **450 ha** in 2023 and then decreasing to around 150 ha by 2037. The land disturbed by mining activities will be rehabilitated progressively and returned to a grazing and nature conservation land use. The major effect on other existing land uses is the lease of surrounding land to Speldon Partnership Dairy for grazing and fodder production. This will increase Speldon Partnership's available agricultural land by 1,130 ha. Due to the terms of the lease, it is likely that the carrying capacity of the land will increase. It is therefore likely that the agricultural productivity of the land will improve and agricultural employment will increase during the course of the amended Project.*

We must keep the proposed land use area in perspective when evaluating the impact of the mine on the Gloucester region.

It could be argued that land subdivisions covered in solar panels (yes we support the solar industry) negatively impacts the rural amenity of a township and surrounding lands and that building factories or dairy infrastructure equally impacts the scenic amenity.

This is a small, low impact mine in a vast valley.

3. The project is too close to the town of Gloucester and would result in unacceptable risks of noise, blasting and air quality impacts for residents.

As discussed earlier, the residents of Gloucester do not live in a vacuum and are currently exposed to all manner of unassessed non-mining noise, pollution and air quality risks.

This mine meets all non-discretionary criteria.

Put simply; if it meets the criteria, then it must be approved.

4. The project would have unacceptable visual impacts.

The Avon valley is not the Mecca of *destination Gloucester*.

It offers little tourism value apart from a passive green backdrop, as discussed in more detail at point 2. The mine is but a pinprick in relation to the Gloucester valley as a whole. This mine is well removed from major arteries and is not easily seen.

From my perspective, any negative visual impacts need to be very carefully weighed against the very clear economic advantages. They cannot be neatly isolated, one from the other. The mine will create jobs, growth and increased economic prosperity that readily mitigates any modest visual changes.

Subtle change to the current visual impact of the Avon valley will in my opinion have no affect on the diverse tourism amenity of the Gloucester region. Increased visitation will flow directly to and result in, increased tourism.

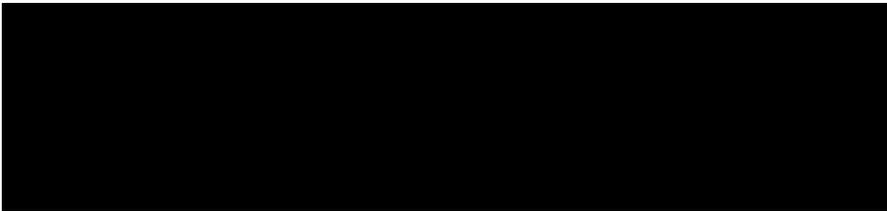
5. The project is not in the public interest.

Gloucester has endured and overcome many difficult challenges in its evolutionary story.

It has a long history of re-inventing itself in order to reap the benefits of opportunity. Opportunity is in the public interest. It is opportunity that provides jobs, security, funding for community projects and hope.

Gloucester needs hope for the future. The prospect of the Rocky Hill mine provides hope for everyone in Gloucester and that is definitely in the public interest.

We sincerely thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your deliberations.



John Kitchener

Suzanne Kitchener