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## Presentation for Wambo Mod 17 PAC

### Rivers SOS (Janet Fenwick)

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Good morning Commissioners and members of the community.

This is the 17<sup>th</sup> modification of the consent granted to Wambo Coal in February 2004. That is 17 modifications in 13 years, more than one a year!! Then there is the United Wambo Open Cut Coal Project, adjacent to the current Wambo open cut mine, awaiting approval, another super pit for our area! There is no end to it!

Surely the proposed disturbance of another 508 ha of previously unmined land should require a new development consent, considering that much of the area is outside Wambo's current Mining and Coal Lease Boundary (according fig 2, p2 of Planning and Environment Environmental Assessment Report).

The maps in the report are difficult to read and interpret on line – colours and boundaries are not distinct.

This current Modification will extend the life of the mine to 2039! That is 22 years! Surely we can hope that some leadership in our country will ensure that we have developed environmentally responsible ways of producing energy and coal mining is minimised before then.

*In December last*

~~Earlier this~~ year Mod 12 was approved. Again it was an approval to mine a further 840 ha of land of which 185 ha is previously unmined. Why, after all of the preparation for that, have Wambo decided to delay starting the South Wambo Mine?

Rivers SOS is concerned with the loss of water from streams and aquifers. Water losses in so many river systems in NSW can be attributed to coal mining, for example the Cataract River, which is part of Sydney's water supply, Bowman's Creek and Wambo Creek, both in the local area. We cannot survive without water, and in the driest inhabited continent in the world we need to take more care with our limited water resources and have more respect for our environment.

This approval will add to the losses previously experienced. From the EIS of 1991, to the EIS of 2003 to the present time, Wambo Creek (called South Wambo Creek in 1991) has changed from permanent in 1991, intermittent in 2003 to ephemeral today. This is solely attributable to the impacts of mining beneath it and in the surrounding aquifers. (This damage to the creeks and subsequent loss of flow is acknowledged in the 2003 EIS.)

Wambo acknowledge "The modification would cause surface and sub-surface subsidence impacts, including cumulative subsidence impacts, which could affect a range of surface water and groundwater features." (p 18). Predictions of groundwater inflows are 376 ML per year. It could be much more, and needs to be accurately monitored. Maybe this amount should be taken from Wambo's water allocation? This is water lost from the ground water system, water that will

not be going back into the damaged aquifers. When cumulative impacts on water are investigated, historic losses due to mining need to be considered as well. It is stated in the Secretary's Assessment Report that North Wambo Creek has been impacted by the near by open cut mine. This is why the North Wambo Creek diversion was necessary.

The prediction is that ground water will not have recovered in 200 years; it will still be below pre-mining levels. None of us will be here to see the outcome, but that prediction does not look good! In the short term there are questions about Wambo's ability to deal with salinity under the current trading scheme. The prediction that salinity could be a problem in approximately 100 years is regarded as insignificant!

How short-sighted are they? The land will still be here in thousands of years to come, but all that is being considered is the short term gain for a multinational company and some royalties for NSW State Government! Don't we owe our environment and our future generations a bit more than that?

The Independent Expert Scientific Committee (IESC) was critical of the water quality monitoring of the existing operations, stating surface and groundwater figures had been "calculated erroneously" using areas already impacted by mining, making it difficult to detect impacts of future mining.

IESC also have concerns about the drawdown from groundwater and changes to surface flows in North Wambo Creek, and monitoring, mitigation and management strategies have not been adequately addressed. The IESC and the Division of Crown Lands and Water (CLWD) are both concerned with the information supplied and the need for further investigation and monitoring. Wambo have come to conclusions based on using data from a single borehole.

The Department has recommended a condition requiring Wambo to commission a Groundwater Dependent Ecosystem Study. (p 23) Surely this should have been done before this PAC was convened to ensure all information is available and considered before a determination is made.

A drop of 1.85 metres is predicted for 3 panels along North Wambo Creek. This will cause significant ponding along the creek, and after heavy rain erosion will occur, and it will be difficult to repair.

In the Secretary's Assessment Report the claim is made that "Direct hydraulic connection between the surface and the longwall voids has previously been observed at only one location, during extraction of longwalls 9 and 9A in the Homestead Mine beneath Stony and Wambo Creeks." This was in 1998. This was only apparent because water poured into the underground workings where they were mining. It probably happened in many other places but remained undetected. The claim that "a temporary reduction in surface flows occurred during remediation works, although there does not appear to be any flow loss since the remediation", is not valid. The issue being that there are now no flows in the creek except for rare flood events, in fact there has been no flow in Wambo Creek above longwalls 9 and 9A, or anywhere else along the creek for at least 18 months. This is despite heavy rainfall events in March and October this year.

On page 33 of the Secretary's Assessment Report it states "Furthermore, in accordance with both the AIP (NSW Aquifer Interference Policy) and existing consent conditions, WCPL is required to

‘make good’ impacts on privately-owned water bores where there is > 2 m cumulative drawdown, or cumulative pressure head decline of > 40% where the ‘post Water Sharing Plan’ pressure head above the base of the water source is less than 5 m.” How do you envisage this will be done? Experience indicates this is very unlikely to happen.

Evidence shows that listed threatened species, including the Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot will be impacted by this modification. Where are these birds expected to go? Their habitat is being destroyed daily. I am sure you are aware of recent clearing in the Warkworth open cut mine area. This habitat destruction is the cause of other problems too, for example the flying fox problem in Singleton.

The Central Hunter Valley Eucalypt Forest and Woodland Ecological Community are also threatened. Offsets don’t work, you cannot destroy an area and commit to not destroying another and expect that to be adequate compensation! The whole concept of off-sets defies logic. The cumulative impact of land clearing for all of the mines in the Hunter Valley needs to be considered. When will the environment have its turn?

Do Wambo Coal satisfy the “fit and proper person” test as required by the Mining Act of 1992? Surely rehabilitation should be done as soon as it becomes apparent, rather than deferring it (or ignoring it). Repairs done in a timely manner are more cost effective and show a commitment to rehabilitation. Orders from DIPNR to Wambo to repair Wambo Creek issued in March 2004 have not been done. Since then further damage has occurred on 3 occasions when there were flows after heavy rain. How can the authorities let this happen? Individuals would face heavy fines if they defied Orders, yet multinational mining companies seem to be exempt!

Wambo Coal Mining Leases cover an area in the vicinity of 10 000 hectares. This is a large area, mostly owned by Wambo Coal. Previously this was productive agricultural land. There were dairies, fruit growing, grazing and horse studs in the area. Now it is little better than a neglected wasteland.

Wambo has had more than its share of environmental incidents, the most recent being a fine after a sediment dam collapse after heavy rain in January 2016. Other infringements include offensive odour in May 2014, excessive blast fumes in July 2012 and water spill after a borehole pump failure in June 2008. There are a number of other incidents.

Who are future generations going to hold responsible for the environmental disaster of the Upper Hunter? Will it be the multinational mining companies who have created the mess or our politicians and public servants who have supported and encouraged them?

It is time for the NSW Government to take up the challenge to invest in alternate forms of energy and become environmentally responsible and reject this modification.

