

Good Morning Commissioners, my name is Robert McLaughlin.

I wish to acknowledge the Wanarua people and their elders past and present the original custodians of this area of the Hunter Valley that includes my home at Bulga. I purchased our land at Inlet Rd in Bulga 1982 and built a house there ten years later. I decided to live in Bulga because of its rural beauty, the peace and quiet and friendliness as well as (we now know) the solidarity and integrity of the Bulga Milbrodale community. A community that now finds itself, yet again, after decisions by both the NSW Land & Environment Court and the NSW Supreme court fronting the NSW Government's PAC.

My wife and I chose to live in Bulga, safe in the knowledge that we were protected by a Ministerial Deed of Agreement. We thought this agreement between the NSW Gov and Rio Tinto to be a rock solid agreement to protect us and the local environment in perpetuity from the impacts of Rio Tinto's mining. At that time the people of Bulga believed that an international company such as Rio Tinto would act ethically, that is, with honesty and decency in its dealing with the local community. **How wrong we were! Wrong to trust Rio Tinto and the NSW Government to stick by an agreement.** An agreement that by not being honoured Rio Tinto proceeded to white ant the Ministerial Deed and the people of Bulga. Rio Tinto and their mates in Government (some of those mates) are now to face the authorities with questions as to their honest y.

What value is given to our community?

In Bulga we have a vibrant cross section of people of various age groups and stages in their lives some in the community are of a mature age and find it unbelievable that their beautiful properties are now, thanks to skulduggery from impossible to be displaced. Their right to retire and live out their days peacefully in the home they chose decades ago. What are they to do if these projects are to proceed? Our properties are now unsaleable .

The area to be mined has a deep cultural significance to local Aboriginal peoples. This area harbours the critically endangered and world unique Warkworth Sands Woodlands .This is the area that forms a buffer that protects the village of Bulga from the noise, dust and light of the Warkworth mine. But the expansion proposal before us today does not make good on the promise to "**permanently protect**" a non-disturbance area on Saddle Ridge – it proposes to mine it in a huge open cut.

The Mt Thorley Warkworth expansions have long been challenged by the community of Bulga, with a previous approval overturned by the Land and Environment Court finding "the Project would have significant and unacceptable impacts on biological diversity, including on endangered ecological communities, noise impacts and social impacts."

The judgment stated, "The Project's impacts would exacerbate the loss of sense of place, and materially and adversely change the sense of community, of the residents of Bulga and the surrounding countryside." In two and half years, this has not changed.

The rules in NSW tip the scales in favour of large multinational mining companies. In the case of this mine, the rules were quite literally changed to favour Rio Tinto's expansion plans for these projects, after successful court challenges by the Bulga community.

79% of people polled in NSW believe the coal industry has too much influence on our government. In public debate in NSW, this project is regarded as a prime example of industry and government collusion at the expense of community and environmental health – with laws changed to enable Rio Tinto's project, joining forces against the local community in court, and secret working groups work shopping how to fast-track the project through the planning system.

The expansion proposal before us today makes a mockery of the planning and approval processes of this state.

### **Conclusion**

The Australia Institute's Rod Campbell has demonstrated to us here that Rio Tinto has grossly overstated the economic benefits of these projects. Also most of the profits go off shore with very little and in some cases absolutely no tax being paid on those profits. While we as tax payers fund infrastructure to aid their business such as road, rail and port facilities as well as fuel subsidies.

Important to remember that

\*95% of Hunter Valley residents do not work in the mining industry.

\*Mining contributes less than 2% of NSW state revenue.

\*The real funding for our hospitals, schools and public transport comes from the Commonwealth (47%) and state taxes (37%).

- \* Downplayed the Health costs: the impact of the particulates, over 13 Million litres of publically subsidised diesel fuel is burnt monthly at MTW. noise, light all effecting our daily life. The stress of the most valuable material possession one's property being worthless.
- \* The Social Cost: The community being purposely divided. Of residents are left stranded, their properties worthless. Rio Tinto buying a number of properties while the majority. Of residents are left stranded, their properties worthless.
- \* Downplayed the environmental costs: the loss of the world unique Warkworth Sands Woodland, the threat to water and biodiversity
- \* Downplayed the social costs: the impact on the community of Bulga and Milbrodale, loss to the aboriginal people of the sacred aboriginal areas
- \* the impact on water and biodiversity

\*95% of Hunter Valley residents do not work in the mining industry.

\*Mining contributes less than 2% of NSW state revenue.

\*The real funding for our hospitals, schools and public transport comes from the Commonwealth (47%) and state taxes (37%).

\*Coal royalties are less important to the state than gambling taxes (\$1.8).