

# Submission to PAC regarding

## WARKWORTH COAL MINE CONTINUATION PROJECT Refs: R027/14, R028/14

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### BACKGROUND

I am a resident of Bulga in the Hunter Valley and **I oppose** the proposed expansion of the Warkworth Mine / Mount Thorley Mine towards our village as a giant open cut coal mine. I have less of a problem if the mine proprietors decide to continue with the mining in this area by underground methods. Our family has been living in Bulga Inlet since 1987. We have built a house, planted a beautiful garden, vineyard and a fruit orchard. Since Rio Tinto Warkworth Mine commenced to push for an open cut expansion west towards the Bulga village, our lives were severely disrupted for the following reasons.

We moved to Bulga on the basis of the understanding that the Warkworth and Mount Thorley open cut coal mines would not expand west towards our township. This was enshrined in legal documents in 2003. These were supposed to protect the Saddle Ridge and Warkworths Sands ecological reservation area from further open cut mine expansion in perpetuity. Yet not even ten years later the Warkworth Mine parent company Rio Tinto and the NSW Planning Department regulators decided to break this legal agreement and allow the Warkworth Mine expansion westwards within 2.6 km of Bulga. This move was defeated twice in hearings based on merit. First by the NSW Land and Environmental Court and then, the second time, by the NSW High Court.

I cannot understand why this is not sufficient to settle the matter. Why should the citizens of Bulga write submissions and go through the PAC process again. This time Rio Tinto split the mine expansion into two separate projects - one for the Warkworth Mine and the other for Mount Thorley Mine. We know that Rio Tinto is trying to get out of coal mining in the Hunter since it is no longer profitable and that this expansion is supposed to make the sale of the mine easier.

As far as Bulga is concerned, these are just legal acrobatics. **It is the same mine expansion project!** The Mount Thorley in year three will become just an overburden dump and should not be treated as a separate mining project. My objections to the mining expansion are, therefore, the same for both projects and so I am submitting the same arguments twice.

## THE PROBLEMS

*The main health problems with this Rio Tinto mines expansion such as air and noise pollution are covered in my husband's submission. I shall, therefore, concentrate on the problems associated with the destruction of the property values around the Hunter Valley coal mines and the associated health stress.*

## DESTRUCTION OF THE PROPERTY VALUES

The right to own a property is the base of the Australian way of life. For most people this means to acquire and develop a family home and eventually to pass its value to children or to grandchildren. *Families living near coal mines or coal seam gas projects are denied this basic citizen right. Our homes in the Bulga valley are subject to the negative effects of both the coal and the CSG industries expansion. In contrast to other parts of the country, in the last three years there were hardly any property sales in Bulga. Our homes have become worthless! This problem is supposed to be solved by the current property acquisition schema which is, unfortunately, deeply flawed.*

The industrial entity, in our case the Warkworth Mine, which destroys the property values by its very existence is also in charge of the compensation. The mine pays an "independent" consultants who then determine acquisition boundaries by proprietary mining noise modelling. These computer models are not open to outside inspection. As they say in computing "garbage in, garbage out". Selected local residents are then forced to negotiate with the legal departments of a giant multinational company about a compensation. This is hardly just or fair. It is in the interest of the company to pay as little as possible so destroying the property values is to their advantage.

## NEGATIVE HEALTH EFFECTS DUE TO STRESS AND UNCERTAINTY

Rio Tinto in its many publications always stresses that the mine and its 1300 employees, "need certainty". They do not seem to realise that their neighbours, who do not benefit from the mining activities at all, need certainty too. Since the mine expansion started by braking the 2003

Saddleback Ridge protection agreement in 2012, our lives are in ruin. We are forced constantly to attend meetings and write submission. These are then completely ignored by both the mine and by the government regulators.

We see the NSW government joining a big transnational company in a High Court appeal against a small NSW village. We see the laws of the land changed so that the Land and Environment Court could never again decide against a mining company. We see the environment of the Hunter Valley destroyed while the mining scars growing like cancer year by year. We see the result of our life's work turning to nothing. All this leads to stress, depression and damage to our health. This combined effect of "environmentally induced desolation and powerlessness that impacts on people in the zone of affectation of coal mines" is called **sofistaigia**. In other words, 'local' residents are treated by the resource industry as roadkill!

## WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

### PROTECTION OF THE LOCAL PROPERTY VALUES

This is probably the hardest problem that would require a complete rethink of the relation between the local communities and the coal companies. It should be made clear here that I am proposing a safety net and that I am not fishing for a compensation or handouts. In our case we are perfectly happy to live where we are and we do not want to move anywhere. Yet the time could come that we might be forced to leave our property. We need a fair and a just system that will allow us to do so. It is not our fault that the real estate market values in Bulga have been destroyed by the mining companies. How about this solution.

Before granting a mining licence to a company, rights of the villages neighbouring the future mine should be considered and a protective buffer zone, say 10 km, around the mine established. The properties of the land owners in the zone would be evaluated by an independent valuer to determine their real estate values before any mining activity

commences. Next the mining company would lodge the combined value of all the properties into an independent Community Trust Fund. If during the life of the mine anyone within the buffer zone cannot sell their property, the Trust would buy it for the original value then rent it or, possibly, sell it. At the end of the life of the mine the Trust would be liquidated, all trust properties sold and the balance of the money returned to the mining company. The same could be done for mines already existing. There is even a partial precedent. We already have 2km protective zone that prevents CSG developments close to the local towns and villages. All coal mines and big companies like Rio Tinto should follow this concept.

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