

Good afternoon Planning Assessment Commission – Mr Paul Forward, Ms Lynelle Briggs AO and Mr Gordon Kirby fellow speakers and public guests.

My name is Ryan Fox and I am 25 year old qualified mining engineer employed at the Mt Thorley Warkworth Complex having progressed through the Rio Tinto Coal graduate program. I am a local resident and I was not only born but also recently married in Singleton. After spending my childhood in Singleton where I attended school and playing competitive sport, I moved to Sydney to complete a tertiary education.

From an early age it was clear to me as to what career I wanted to pursue – I chose mining – an industry that I grew up in which provided a lifestyle for myself, my family and the broader community. In pursuing my Mining Engineering studies I was quietly planning and hoping that I would end up living in the Hunter Valley and employed in not just any coal mine but a 'Tier 1' operation. How fortunate I am so far, to have built a house with my wife in Singleton, both our parents live in Singleton and yes Mt Thorley Warkworth is a 'Tier 1' mining asset in the world renowned Hunter Coalfield.

I have seen the town and district positively transform over the past 20 years as the mining industry grew and expanded, stimulated by world demand for our prime thermal and semi soft coking coals. The past couple of years and more recently the past year has been the toughest that I have seen yet with the veterans of the industry concurring that the 4 or 5 big downturns over the past 30 years, this one is the toughest, resulting in a large number of job losses with some high cost mines closing or placed in indefinite 'care & maintenance'. This has had a direct effect on other surrounding industries and local businesses both small and large like never before. The result has meant employees let go or worse the doors are closed as the crunch became too much.

MTW though brings work and plenty of it which is keeping the remaining businesses afloat. The employees, customers, contractors and stakeholders all rely on safely and competitively operating at a 12Mtpa product coal rate each and every year which will not be sustainable if the approval for continuous operation is not favourable. As a local, as an employee and a community member we need this approval to be favourable for our future and our children's future here in the Hunter Valley.

Engineering is a fine art in many fields and in mining it is about utilising the resource we have and recovering the product as safely and efficiently as possible. MTW's mineable reserves, should it be approved, is vast with an enviable coal quality guaranteeing current output, employment and government revenue (taxes, royalties etc) – if not – put simply it will not be vast, profitable,

beneficial and the future is not great. From my perspective as a mine planner I understand the end goal however I am always missing one of the corner pieces and can never complete the picture on my own. Completion is achieved from experience and MTW has plenty of that with some of the best. This is the experience that I enthusiastically turn up to work for each day. There is no better way to learn than being hands on in the mine with the various operators and maintainers from all walks of life, these are the men and women who make the operation a success and these are the men and women whose jobs are on the line.

It struck me last month what a world class operation and resource MTW really is. I took a visitor around the complex, an outsider to Rio Tinto who has never been to Mt Thorley or Warkworth before however has worked in the industry for over 35 years both locally and internationally and who continually praises the Hunter Valley mining industry as a global supplier of prime thermal and semi soft coking coals with a number of world class operations of which MTW is one. I would imagine that the number of global sites that he has worked at or visited over the years would be difficult to recall, yet at first glance and from a distance the size, organisation and mining methodology clearly stood out as a 'tier 1' asset. How lucky are we as a community to have such a world class resource and operation with an owner, Rio Tinto, keen and committed to continue investing in MTW's future, our Future.

So here we are today faced with some of the toughest market conditions that the industry has faced for many years, but MTW a fully operational 30 year old mine is prevailing and has the potential to prosper for another 21 years. If it prospers, the employees and contractors prosper, small and large businesses in the towns and cities of the Hunter Valley will prosper and local, state and federal governments will get their fair share.

The positive realities of mining will remain a fundamental part of the Hunter Valley and Mount Thorley Warkworth should continue to be a part of this at its full potential. We have co-existed with the community and other industries and will continue to do so in the future.

Thank you all for your time to allow me to speak today.