

Submission for Rio Tinto Mt Thorley Continuation Project

Please find below my submission to the abovementioned application. My name is Andrew Upward and I have lived in [REDACTED] all my life (36 years).

In 2013 the NSW Land and Environment Court rejected the mining of Saddle Ridge as part of a previous application made by Rio Tinto. This new application to mine into Saddle Ridge must also be refused.

Rio Tinto is requesting approval to mine into Saddle Ridge to “*preserve the viability of Warkworth Mine and maintain current employment as close as possible to current levels*”. What Rio Tinto aren’t stating is that they signed a Deed of Agreement in 2003 promising that it would never open cut mine Saddle Ridge, that it would not apply to Singleton Council to have the Saddle Ridge area mined and that it would protect the village of Bulga. It was because of this agreement I purchased my property in Bulga in 2003. I had peace of mind knowing the Mine wasn’t going to reach Saddle Ridge and my quiet lifestyle wasn’t going to be jeopardised.

Rio Tinto Australia’s website says that “*Good community relations are as necessary for our business success as the effective management of our operations.*” Rio Tinto state time after time that they are community minded and care about the communities, however it seems this only happens if they make the quota of however many millions of money they need to make per year.

Rio Tinto have previously made DA Application’s **WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATION** with the people of Bulga. In this instance, Rio Tinto met with community representatives 3 weeks before at the Community Consultative Committee, no advice was given on this proposed application even though it was well under way and ready to submit. The people that call Bulga home are going to be most impacted by this or any other expansion and yet Rio Tinto don’t have the decency to hold a meeting to advise the people in the village on what’s happening. What they did do is drop a fancy pamphlet in the mail notifying us of their application. Environmental Impact Statements that are required when making an application and the abovementioned pamphlets just don’t get typed and printed over night, they take a couple of months to get produced and printed which proves they knew about the application when they met with the Community Consultative Committee. Rio Tinto only care about profit and not people.

Saddle Ridge

Saddle Ridge is a vital barrier between the Bulga village and the noise and dust of Warkworth Mine. In 2003 Rio Tinto signed a Deed of Agreement with the Government agreeing they would preserve this area and would never be mined.

Ecology

The Environmental Assessment Rio Tinto provided to support their application is appalling and full of lies. This extension will destroy an Endangered Ecological Community containing Central Hunter Grey Box-Ironbark Woodland and Central Hunter Ironbark-Spotted Gum-Grey Box forest vegetation.

The offset Rio Tinto propose is not 'like for like' and should not be suggested. Saddle Ridge needs to be preserved in its own right.

Noise

Residents of Bulga are constantly complaining about noise coming from the Warkworth mine and Rio Tinto have been fined for exceeding noise limits. Last year alone, the mine received 800 noise complaints. No increase in noise levels is acceptable and more tight actions must be taken to lower existing noise levels from the Warkworth Mine. It is clear the mine cannot currently control the effects of noise so what hope have we got if they move closer? In the Environmental Impact Study submitted by the mine in support of their application, they have carefully selected noise data from one monitor that shows relative compliance and not data from other monitors that show constant excessive levels.

Air Quality

As a father of two children under 5, air quality is very important to me. Air quality has a major impact on the health of residents living in areas around open cut mines. Warkworth Mine has been fined for excessive dust and this will only get worse if the application is approved.

Jobs

Government must weigh up the benefit of jobs versus the cost to the community. People have the right to live in quiet enjoyment without the constant noise, dust and visual impacts of mining.

Rio Tinto went on a big recruitment drive at their Warkworth Mine so they would have the man force ready to work when they got the approval they were expecting to extend their mine. So now for them to claim that they need this approval "*to maintain current employment as close as possible to current levels*" is upsetting. This is a scare tactic being used by Rio Tinto to their employees and also using it as a sympathy tactic for other people to feel sorry for their employees and support the expansion. This reason must not be the basis of mining into an agreed non-disturbance area.

Mines may provide jobs but if this is at the expense of the community's health associated with living near an open cut mine, then it is too big a price to pay.

All mines in the Hunter Valley have an end date, it comes part in parcel of working in the mines. The current end date for Warkworth mine is 2021, that is 8 year from now and gives employees plenty of time to find future employment.

It should also be stated that we have asked Rio Tinto to mine underground which they constantly refuse. The reason for this refusal is they won't make as much profit as they would if they open cut mined. Are they really looking out for their employees?

Visual Impact

The overburden removal and the ever increasing overburden dumps will be evident to the residents of Bulga who live on the more elevated properties. Further, the massive excavation into the eastern side of Saddle Ridge will have a major visual impact when viewing the Ridge from the east. The reinstatement and rehabilitation of the devastated Saddle Ridge will be impossible.

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage

The Aboriginal Cultural heritage in the expansion area must not be destroyed. Four out of seven artefacts remain from those identified in the earlier EA. With this expansion the remaining four will be destroyed. These artefacts were intending for preservation under the Deed of Agreement of 2003. This will not be honoured under this expansion.

Economic

No economic assessments in support of the project have been provided nor is their any evidence available to justify the statements of Rio Tinto that they must expand the mine to maintain its viability and jobs.

I believe Rio Tinto are now using a 'bit by bit' approach which could continue for numerous years. Should the mine get approval for this application then the same argument will again be used by Rio Tinto in two years time to justify another expansion into Saddle Ridge and move closer to the village of Bulga. This will continue until they have mined the whole area that was rejected by the Land and Environment Court earlier this year.

I am asking you to take on board my submission and all submissions made by the residents of Bulga. I have worked hard to reach my goal of owning my own property and the idea that it can be ruined by Rio Tinto is heart breaking. If this expansion goes ahead, I would give up on my dream of owning a large property again anywhere, because nowhere is safe from the government approving mines for the sake of dollars.

Andrew Upward