Nature Conservation Council
The voice for nature in NSW

Robyn Kruk AM
Chair
Planning Assessment Commission
GPO Box 3415
Sydney NSW 2001
Via email: pac@pac.nsw.gov.au

September 22, 2015

Dear Robyn Kruk AM,

RE: Submission regarding the Airly Mine Extension (R033/15)

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) is the peak environment organisation for New South Wales, representing over 150 community environmental organisations across the state. Together we are committed to protecting and conserving the wildlife, landscapes and natural resources of NSW.

We ask that the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) reject the Airly Mine Extension due to the impacts on outstanding natural values and the inadequate management measures further outlined below. If the PAC does approve the project we request that strict conditions be placed on the mine to ensure damage to the natural environment is minimised.

Impact on the natural environment

If the project is approved, we request that the Planning Assessment Commission place conditions on the project that will greatly reduce the risk that this mine will pose to features such as high cliffs and pagodas. We refer the PAC to submissions by the Colong Foundation for Wilderness and the Colo Committee for further detail regarding proposed conditions that will reduce the risk to these outstanding natural features.

For many years we supported the efforts of local conservation organisations to seek protection for the area now included in the Mugii Murum-ban state conservation area (SCA) in recognition of its natural values and outstanding beauty. It is highly concerning that a place with such natural values is proposed to be undermined, particularly in light of the pagodas and cliffs in the area.

We would particularly like to draw the PAC's attention to the history of the mine as it is relevant to the current project application. It is our understanding that Centennial Coal supported the creation of the Mugii Murum-ban SCA and committed to only ever undermine 50% of the available coal under the mesas in the SCA. This figure is substantial in its own right, however the current proposal would see a much greater proportion of the coal mined. This is not only a breach of trust by Centennial Coal but also of significant concern for the natural values of the area, particularly the cliffs and pagodas.

Inadequate waste management arrangements

Further to anticipated damage to natural features, we are concerned that Centennial Coal's plans outlined in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to manage the waste products from the mine are inadequate. We draw particular attention to the proposal for the reject emplacement area intended to store both course and fine waste from the project. Currently there is no proposal to enclose this waste, which is unacceptable. We are concerned about the integrity of the waste heap and the potential for environmental disaster if not managed correctly.

The EIS also makes passing reference to the prospect of acid metalliferous leachate. It is simply unacceptable for the PAC to approve a project which is so clearly failing to manage the waste products from its operations. We recommend the PAC place strict conditions on the project regarding waste management, specifically to ensure that a sound, engineered structure is in place to store the solid waste, and that materials that may result in acid mine drainage are properly managed to protect the surrounding natural environment.

Thank you for considering our submission regarding the Airly Mine Extension proposal. We seek your support to protect the natural values of this area by rejecting this mine proposal. However if it is to be approved we request the PAC place strict conditions on the mine as referenced above. Please do not hesitate to contact [redacted] on [redacted] or [redacted] to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Smolski

[redacted]