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Public hearing Vickery mine extension – 5 February

This is a presentation prepared by Dr Kerri Clarke, the Maules Creek Coal Mine Community Consultative Committee, Environmental Representative from the community environmental group Sustainable Living Armidale.

I wish to elaborate on the SLA submission objecting to the Whitehaven coal application to extend the Vickery coal mine. In my time as the Environmental Representative on the Maules Creek Coal mine Community Consultative Committee (CCC) since November 2015, I have found Whitehaven Coal to be uncooperative in providing information in what I believe are attempts to limit community consultation. The Community Consultative Committee meeting minutes since the first meeting in June 2013 are provided on the WHC Maules Creek Mine web page as a requirement. From the minutes dated 7 June 2013 *‘The purpose for the committee is to provide a forum for the community and Maules Creek to exchange information and to engage in consultation on matters affecting the community. John [John Turner – Chair] requested that the representatives of the community should liaise with the community and bring topical items to the CCC for discussion’*. The CCC is the only form of community consultation undertaken by WHC – sometimes with only three community members attending. WHC gained approval to construct and operate the mine without a community environmental representative in place and none in place until November 2015 – more than two years after the first CCC meeting despite the Department of Planning requirement. Appointment of Sustainable Living Armidale as the environmental community group came about after a furious Greening Australia sent an official letter stating their non-involvement in the MCC CCC and that the apologies for not attending meetings on 14 August 2013, 19 November 2013 (triple mine meeting), and 6 August 2014 were not made by them. No explanation was ever received as to how these false apologies occurred. The Biodiversity Management Plan was approved and revised multiple times without adequate community consultation during this time.

The general public believe that there are protection measures in place that keep mining companies in check, but I have experienced that these requirements are easily changed or

breaches result in an insignificant fine. For example, seed collection of the public owned Leard State Forest – traditional country of the Gomeri people – was required before being cleared to ensure local genetic material with high genetic variability for rehabilitation purposes. Seed collection did not take place and WHC fined after land clearing, including critically endangered White box communities, had taken place.

White box woodland has been cleared to represent only 0.1% of the original cover Australia wide, as much of this vegetation type covered what is now agricultural land. Leard SF contained a high-quality remnant of 1100 ha of White box woodland listed as a critically endangered ecological community. The WHC fact sheet about Maules Creek mine states that they will be clearing almost one third of the remaining area of White box woodland. Leard Forest contained 395 plant species that formed vital habitat for fauna, some of which are listed threatened species. Two thirds of the Leard State Forest is being cleared by the three mines – two of which are owned by WHC. Commonwealth offsets are still not finalised despite the approval requirements and extensions have been provided, and yet the threatened vegetation communities continue to be cleared. The initial offsets were not correct – some not even close to the communities being cleared and did not satisfy the like-for-like requirements. Yet clearing of public owned forests continues. Finding other properties with similar quality and structural qualities as the land being cleared is difficult when such small areas are left intact. Why is forest clearing allowed when the requirements to do so are not in place? I do not believe that the cumulative impact of clearing for the region has been properly considered.

I have not even touched on many of the issues I have encountered, including impacts and mistreatment of farming neighbours and traditional custodians. Based on my experience as the MCC CCC environmental representative, I completely understand why members of the community do not have faith in WHC being able to consider the environment or the community in which it operates.

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