

I thank the commissioners for the opportunity to speak here today.

Firstly, I would like to introduce myself.

My name is Margarete Ritchie and I live on [REDACTED] My family has lived here since 1990.

I am president of VOWW (Voice of Wallalong and Woodville) which is a community organisation including not just those 2 localities but also others as far as Paterson. Obviously, many of these residents use the local road network and may even use Paterson for some of their needs, for example to see the doctor, visit the pharmacy or like me, play golf and then have coffee at the Paterson Riverside café. These are all localities that will be impacted upon by the Martins creek quarry expansion.

Please keep in mind that what I have to say incorporates the views and experiences of many in the community.

**The merit review of the social impact statement** mentions identifying, predicting, evaluating and developing responses for social impact. I don't believe this has been adequately addressed with reference to the problems along the haulage routes. The example of the intersection of Paterson Rd and Tocal Rd springs to mind where no mention has been made of the cumulative impact of 2 quarries at that intersection and no thought given to the safety aspects, in fact MCC was not even aware that this was going to be an issue and therefore, as far as I am aware, did not bring it to the attention of DPE

It also notes that social impacts are consequences experienced by people as a result of changes associated with that project.....direct, indirect or cumulative and must consider the public interest which includes the promotion of the social and economic welfare of the community. My assumption is that means the local community but I believe must also take into consideration those that are impacted by the haulage of the product. How can a community like Paterson ever continue to exist let alone thrive with haulage trucks rumbling through ever minute of the day?

So, in my presentation, the issues that I will be dealing with include:

**Noise, amenity, ambience and character of the area, safety and cumulative impact.**

I will refer to the lived experience that my community has had to endure with truck movements along what is referred to as haulage route 2. This was a route

that was used by both Brandy Hill quarry and Daracon for major and minor contracts for many years.

The horror years for us were around 2013 and 2014 when both quarries were sending up to 600 trucks per day along BHDR leading onto Seaham Rd through to RT. Cumulatively, 1200 trucks! Neither quarry felt that that was an imposition on residents even though both quarries were not adhering to their conditions of consent. It is understandable that our residents are a bit nervous about Daracon's mention of haul route 2 for "local" contracts! The ramifications were huge. Safety, physical and mental health issues, sleep deprivation for shift workers to name some of the major problems. Getting out of the driveway or children walking to bus stops on the side of the road with no footpath. I don't have the time here to go through all of the social impacts that arose at that time.

So, we have the lived experience at Brandy Hill for what will be the future for residents of Bolwarra and beyond. That is when the trucks from Hanson and Daracon meet at the corner of Tocal Rd and Paterson Rd Bolwarra heights.

**I will begin with noise.**

**The only effective way to reduce or eliminate truck generated noise is to remove them from the roads altogether.**

**Daracon has that option by using the rail network.** It might take a bit more planning, but it is not impossible and should be the number one priority. Associated cost is something that all business must take into consideration and is factored into the bottom line. Perhaps one way of addressing this is to charge more realistic road levies that are in line with the true costs of maintaining roads and that would make it a more level playing field in the argument of road or rail. And the winners will be the many communities and businesses along the haulage routes and the other roads that the truck drivers use that are not gazetted truck routes and certainly not appropriate. It is not the role of the DPE to ensure the profitability of this company, yet it seems so when one reads their reports and submissions where they are happy to prioritise road over rail.

**Nowhere in any reports is there mention of mitigating truck noise. And that is because there is no way of doing it.** And the monetary VPAs or the community fund set up with Dungog Council won't alleviate this issue either.

Noise doesn't just affect homes directly along the haulage route. It depends on the lie of the land, hills, gullies up and downhill

Hunter Glen, a new suburb of Bolwarra Heights, is already being impacted as trucks use engine braking which can be heard well before and after the truck passes and well into the suburb. Even ordinary braking depends on the maintenance of the truck and can be equally intrusive. Engine braking can be heard for several kilometres before a truck passes. And some residents report that the intermittent nature of trucks becomes an issue and is just as intrusive. This is our experience on BHDR and along Seaham Road, Nelsons Plains.

The Department has standards and guidelines for monitoring noise and the reports often refer to “meeting minimum standards”. Is minimum good enough when we are talking about thousands of residents being impacted upon? We all hear noise differently and respond differently too. As an example, I had brain surgery on an aneurism and afterwards found that my noise level tolerance was severely impacted. For quite a while I would react to the noise of a siren, or any jarring noise and it would reduce me to a blubbering mess. Luckily that severity is no longer an issue, but I use it as an example of how varied a personal response can be to noise. And don't believe comments such as, “you get used to it”. You don't.

We don't stay cloistered in our homes. We cycle, walk and talk with friends and neighbours, take babies out in prams to soothe them to sleep, we ride horses along the sides of rural roads, and we want to do these things, live what we expect for our everyday lives without the incessant noise and diesel fumes of trucks.

I do not believe that the issue of noise for residents along the haulage routes has been fully understood or indeed, taken seriously.

**Mental health issues** can't be dealt with in the same way as physical health. The problem can take years to manifest itself and then there is **a tipping point** which brings it all to the surface and it needs to be dealt with. There is a long list of stressors and I have mentioned some already but constant noise, a change in the character or ambience of an area are high on the list. Residents subjected to the noise along the haulage route or those who witness the trucks rolling through Paterson may find that that one issue becomes their tipping point. Again, if I had the time I would delve further into this very serious issue.

### **Safety.**

I would like to bring to your attention the comment I read on the transcript of the meeting commissioners had with staff of the DPE. ...” **the traffic volumes**

**generated by the project would not result in a change to the existing level of service of each of the roads along the primary haulage route.”** These roads are already severely impacted by the extra truck movements and scant mention has been made by the impending cumulative effect when Hanson begins its expansion within the next 12 months and an extra 375 trucks per day will be using the same road network as Daracon. Surely this should be considered a huge safety concern for residents along those routes and those who access those routes daily.

Little thought has been given to **the congestion along Melbourne Street East Maitland** even though traffic volumes are already at capacity. And, MCC has not factored in the impending increase from Hanson. MCC has approved extra DAs along this road from the Pitnacree Rd intersection to the New England Highway, 2 of which are to do with hospitality and one residential apartment block, and it seems without advising the proponents of the extra haulage trucks that will pass by.

A colleague and I visited each of the businesses along that stretch of road to advise them of the pending IPC submission period and noted the difficulties with respect to the driveways leading into some businesses. Here the safe entry or exit was already a problem for staff and customers alike. The impact from the extra trucks along this stretch of road will be well and truly felt and the dangers are not insignificant.

Other safety concerns for the entire haulage route from Bolwarra on include:

- The danger of exiting driveways directly onto the main road.
- The safety concerns around the intersection of Paterson Rd and Tocal Rd. including the entry and exit of the petrol station.
- Entry to the lookout and new toilet and playground facilities. This entry is 10m from the end of the merging lane of the intersection and the park is a well-used public space for locals and tourists.
- The cumulative impact of haulage trucks has already been mentioned.

I am surprised that this intersection, even though mentioned at previous meetings with Daracon and MCC, did not raise a red flag for the DPE. It should be well and truly at the front of their minds now.

The last area I would like to mention is Butterwick Rd, part of haulage route 2. However, commissioners have already visited this area and I will lodge more information on safety of this road in a written submission as the word “local” has still not been adequately addressed.

**Amenity** is not able to be broken down into facts and figures such as truck numbers, decibel readings, hours of operation and so on. Yet all those things affect amenity.

It can be a feeling, a change of ambience, something that cannot be quantified but is a reality, nonetheless. All dictionary definitions refer to the **pleasantness or attractiveness of a place.**

- Has a psychological or social component.
- A pleasant environment equates with amenity.
- The amenity/character provides a 'sense of place' and includes physical safety.

The DPIE guidelines stipulate that character and amenity must be considered when deciding on any planning. (2017 - Secretary DoP) According to the DPIE's own documentation, ***“amenity is the pleasantness, attractiveness, desirability .... very important to stakeholders.... State significant projects should aim to minimise impacts.”*** Yet Daracon has made little attempt to recognise that there will be considerable impact to the wider community and has given scant attention to minimising impact. When we read the term “State Significant” it seems that we, as individuals or as a community, don't seem to be important. We feel devalued.

So, what do residents from Paterson to Bolwarra and those from the VOWW community consider to be the character of their area? There is such a variety of answers that people give, amongst them

- Open landscape.
- Fresh, clean air.
- Lack of industrial/town noises.
- A place to relax in and de-stress for whatever reason.
- The historic buildings

Our sense of place will be severely impacted upon by this proposed expansion through lack of understanding of the character and amenity of the area and of the value we place on our properties, be it psychological or monetary.

The term **Solastalgia** applies to the feeling that residents have when they have no control over their sense of place.

Glenn Albrecht has done much research into negative feeling about loss of sense of place and the concept is now considered an important inclusion into extractive industry planning principles in many European countries as well as New Zealand. I understand that he will be making a submission on this topic himself, but I will quote just one sentence from his research here.

***.....The cumulative impact of these impacts constitutes an amenity and health burden on people who have a reasonable expectation that their lives should not be negatively changed in such a way.***

In all my research into the term ***amenity*** it has highlighted that this element is crucial to the wellbeing of residents, and I can only hope that you, as commissioners, give it the weight it deserves in any determination you make on this project.

I would like to share my personal observation.

The problem with social impact statements is that the staff at DPE, Councils, Consultancies like Umwelt, do not live in the area that they report on. In this case, does anyone live right next door to a quarry or on a major quarry haulage route? If they don't, they have no idea. They interview, take notes and then report that most of the issues can be mitigated in some way. Really?

Margarete

### **+Compliance and Code of Conduct.**

From experience with the Hanson quarry expansion, I would like to impress upon commissioners how difficult it can be in ensuring that quarries comply with the conditions of consent. Self-compliance does not work, and it is unfair for the DPE to expect the public to undertake this role.

Monitoring needs to be rigorously maintained by the consenting authority. If that means having an officer randomly out and about checking on roads travelled, loads through the weighbridge etc, so be it!

Subcontractors must be equally monitored. I have personally reviewed the process that Hanson undertakes for their code of conduct registration, yet they still admit that once a subcontractor leaves the quarry, they have no control of behaviour and rely on public complaints.

There is one question that needs to be asked and hopefully answered. What are the consequences for Daracon or any subsequent owner of the quarry if the conditions of consent are not met?