

## **OBJECTION TO EXPANSION OF MARTINS CREEK QUARRY**

13 November 2022

Thank you again to the Independent Planning Commission for hosting a public meeting on 7 and 8 November 2022 at Tocal College. At the bottom of the Public Meeting Schedule, listing the registered speakers, it was noted the purpose of the Public Meeting was for the Commissioners to hear views on the Department of Planning's Assessment Report of the Project.

I attended both days (excepting the late afternoon session on 7 November) and spoke on the second day, and my speaking notes are provided as an attachment. Leaving aside the presentations by the Applicant, the Department of Planning, and Dungog Shire Council, there were spoken submissions made by more than 45 people and none of the speakers I listened to were in categorical support of the expansion at the scale proposed by the Applicant, deemed approvable by the Department and in turn referred to the Independent Planning Commission for a decision.

I have lived in the village of Paterson for 12 years, 100 metres from the main road, and have experienced the volume of trucks and the associated noise from very early in the morning until late in the afternoon, Monday through Saturday. My own experiences heightened my concerns for both pedestrian and vehicle safety as the trucks passed through the village or on other parts of a second haulage route used prior to 2019, that second route involving travel across the bridge south of Paterson, along Paterson Road, into Duns Creek Road and then into and along Butterwick Road. These lived experiences were detailed in written submissions in 2016 in relation to the proposed 1.45milliontpa operation, and again in 2021 in relation to a revised proposal allowing 1.1milliontpa extraction.

Relating to Gostwyck Bridge, I don't have occasion to travel across it as often as past years but did reference safety concerns in 2016. A stop-light system would seem the most appropriate solution but of course that no doubt impacts nearby residents from a noise perspective.

From an engineering perspective, on page 14 of the transcript of the meeting between the Commissioners and the Applicant held on 19 October, the Applicant confirms a very detailed engineering report was conducted at the request of Transport NSW, which looked at the structural integrity, capacity for the level of truck haulage proposed and maintenance schedule/works contemplated over the life of the Project. The Applicant is then asked who pays for those works, with the reply given that Daracon's contribution was the very expensive engineering assessment report and that the quarry traffic didn't influence it – that schedule significantly. It is further explained that Transport NSW have asked for some upgrades to the bridge deck and Daracon are committed to doing those upgrades with Transport NSW.

Moving on to Paterson, there is little in the Department's Assessment Report to alleviate concerns regarding safety when trying to park outside or close to the Friendly Grocer and/or Butchery on Duke Street, and/or crossing the road in that area if parked on the opposite side of the road, other than a self-imposed speed for trucks of 40km/h. Has proper consideration been given to the safety risk when deliveries are being made to the Paterson Friendly Grocer? Earlier this year I witnessed that the IGA semi-trailer could not park directly outside the Grocer and instead had to proceed along the street and park, wait while parked cars were cleared from outside the Grocer and then reverse back along Duke Street to park and unload. All of this involved a Grocer staff member helping to halt oncoming traffic. So in a future that includes 280 trucks per day, there is repeated likelihood of this scenario, as well as the scenario involving the parked IGA semi-trailer and two quarry trucks (one in each direction) plus a parked car, collectively spaced across the width of road available. The Grocer and Butcher are essential businesses allowing our Community to have access to a good range of meat and groceries without travelling to Maitland all the time. How will both the community and the businesses not be substantially impacted by passing trucks?

The proposed changes at the corner of Duke Street and King Street and the commitment to speed reduction by trucks at that bend do not really help anyone wishing to turn left from Duke Street into King Street, as these vehicles are required to give way to traffic from the north, and this can include a buildup of traffic, including laden trucks, who have been waiting for the boom gates to open after the passing of a freight train on the North Coast railway line crossing less than 100metres away from this Duke/King Street bend. Turning right from King Street into the Paterson Service Station can also be affected for the same reasons. Has due consideration been given to these situations which are part of daily life in Paterson.

In the Assessment Report at point 85 on page 22, it is proposed that Daracon contribute financially towards pedestrian paths and crossings, and bus shelters in Paterson, along with accompanying signage. There is no indication how many bus shelters are intended. There are several different southbound bus services in the morning, ferrying students from north of Paterson, Paterson itself and further south, to All Saints College, Maitland Grossman, Maitland High, Hunter Valley Grammar School, St Joseph's and East Maitland Public School, as well as a northbound bus to Dungog High School. The pickup points for these various buses includes both sides of Duke Street close to the King Street bend, and on both sides of the main road in the vicinity of Stockers and Partridge. Several children walk to the bus stops while many others are driven to bus stops by parents/carers who often wait in cars nearby because there is no other way to get to school if the bus doesn't arrive, which happened on at least two occasions during term 3 of this year (in relation to bus number 2251). Appropriate signage of these various bus stops may assist but I am not sure bus shelters will provide any particular assistance other than shelter from rain or heat. It is hard to understand where pedestrian crossings could be placed and as noted by others, crossings would have to be approved by Transport for NSW.

In my 2021 submission, and in my spoken submission on 8 November, I noted concerns along the haulage route at Bolwarra Heights, including the recently observed situation regarding vehicle movement between a stopped bus and the new pedestrian island near to Canna Street on the main road. My speaking notes also reference concerns the Mayor of Maitland City Council has around impacts from Quarry trucks. Further, on the website of the State MP for Maitland, reference is made to traffic congestion issues in and around Maitland.

Another issue or concern which is applicable in/around the Paterson area and in lower Bolwarra Heights, especially in winter, is the reduced visibility due to heavy fog which on occasions can linger until late morning. For anyone exiting off the Paterson Bridge just south of Paterson, and especially those turning right toward the village, heavy fog and reduced visibility don't mix well with negotiating oncoming traffic, which includes ordinary vehicles all the way up to laden truck-and-dog combination, travelling at 100km/hour. There are no proposed mitigation strategies in the Assessment Report addressing this.

Other speakers referenced the road area passing by Tocal College. I would like to note the Paterson Valley Swimming Club, which has operated for over 40 years, meets on Tuesday evenings during October and March with swimming members arriving from around 4.30-4.45pm. Membership of the Club is contingent on being a season-pass member of the Tocal College Pool, which can include any resident of Bolwarra, Bolwarra Heights, Butterwick, Duns Creek, East Gresford, Gresford, Hilldale, Lambs Valley, Largs, Maitland Vale, Martins Creek, Paterson, Phoenix Park, Tocal, Torryburn, Vacy, Wallalong, Woodville, and Hinton. The Swimming Club did not operate physical swimming seasons during 2020/21 and 2021/22 due to a major repair of Tocal College Pool and the restrictions around Covid. In seasons prior to that, membership of the Swimming Club i.e. those attending on Tuesday evenings, ranged upward of 80 members. In the current season (2022/23), which commenced swimming on 18 October, membership is substantially lower but new members have continued to join as recently as 8 November, and the Club is expectant that in season 2023/24, membership will be closer to seasons past. So in terms of traffic issues there, anyone travelling from the Paterson side of Tocal College has to virtually stop on the 80km/hr road to make a right-turn into the College, due to limited visibility of oncoming traffic. The proposed restriction of no more than 15 truck movements per hour between 3pm and 6pm may assist but Swimming Club members leaving Tocal College after 6pm, and this would be most swimming weeks of the season, need to be mindful of any vehicle, including trucks, already travelling at 80km/hr in either direction.

It has been confirmed we are experiencing a third consecutive La Nina, and there have been regular flooding events during 2020, 2021 and 2022 in Paterson and the lower Hunter, indeed in much of NSW and the East Coast. Unlike the 2015 flooding event which severely impacted Dungog and surrounds, and where over 200mm of rain fell in around 24 hours, the increased rain associated with multiple La Nina events has meant the regular flooding can occur with much lower falls of rain, and ranges from minor, moderate or major. Anyone who travelled from one side of Maitland to the other during early July of this year will easily recall that for several days, travel in either direction involved joining the queue on the only route available, being Melbourne Street/Flat Road. Raymond Terrace Road was also closed for at least two days, closer to the Hunter River crossing. There are no proposed mitigation strategies for these type of situations, and further, what will happen when emergency service vehicles get caught up in these queues?

Regarding proposed rail haulage, I spoke of concerns to the Commission on 8 November, and maintain the concern that if the rail spur is not commissioned within the two-year timing referred specifically to in the Executive Summary and again at page 135, any further delay in its implementation opens up the possibility of the Applicant seeking a variation or amendment regarding the road haulage tonnage.

I am not qualified to speak on the capacity of the rail network to incorporate additional train movements from the Quarry but many speakers have noted the uniqueness of this Quarry with its existing rail siding. According to the current Sydney Network timetable, there are eight passenger train movements between Newcastle/Dungog or in reverse, between 7am and 7pm. These movements affect traffic at not only the Paterson rail crossing but also the Grace Avenue crossing in Martins Creek. During this same period of the day and the same rail crossings, the current timetable for the Countrylink service between Sydney and Brisbane, has five movements. Coupled with the freight trains passing in each direction, has the capacity for the buildup of Quarry trucks at these rail crossings but particularly in Paterson (after year 2 of the expanded of operation) been adequately assessed, in terms of safety and traffic movement before and after each train has passed through?

Some of the speakers at the Public Meeting had concerns around potential road haulage along Martins Creek Road. If so little of the allowable extracted product is being moved by rail for potentially the first six years, should there be designated independent monitoring of any haulage on Martins Creek Road, for instance at its intersection with Paterson Road which is just over the Paterson Bridge? I ask this because heavy vehicle traffic coming out of or entering Martins Creek Road at Paterson Road will impact road users, including school buses, who use the Paterson/Butterwick Roads route.

In the Exhibition Notice issued on 3 June 2021 by the then Department of Planning Industry and Environment regarding SSD-6612 (Martins Creek Quarry Project), the Project has been deemed a Controlled Action under the EPBC Act and sets out detail as to how the proposed development was to be assessed.

I have not concentrated in my past submissions on the environmental issues associated with the proposed expansion of the Quarry but that does not mean I am not concerned with the environment and how much of it is impacted by development generally. I have spent the past 12 years creating gardens in my little patch of dirt, from pretty much a blank canvas, and have included many native plant species. Over this time, my daughter and I have enjoyed watching the growing list of native birds, animals and insects visiting the garden. Some are year-long regulars, others are seasonal. So as a general comment, the proposed expansion of Quarry operations and the impact on habitat is concerning, despite the commitment by Daracon to mitigation measures, including that noted on page 61 to relocate fauna from hollow-bearing trees to adjoining habitat prior to vegetation clearing. Will it be Daracon tasked with identifying all the hollow-bearing trees and if so, how will it be determined a particular tree is not in use just because fauna is not sighted on a particular day?

So much to consider!

Which brings me to my final comments on the Department's Assessment Report. Doing a very simple search on phrases such as 'the Department accepts, the Department acknowledges, the Department recognises', I noted those phrases were closely followed by words like 'notwithstanding, nevertheless, satisfied, unlikely to, appropriate'. I only found three references to 'stringent conditions', all relating to noise, and four references to 'strict conditions' of which just one relates to road upgrades.

This does not give much comfort given the proposed expansion has a lifespan of 25 years.

And the Disclaimer on page i of the Assessment Report, copied and pasted below, probably sums it up best and why we, the people who continued over many years past to oppose this expansion, are now placing faith in the appointed Commissioners, with some level of hope that our voices will be heard.

Extract from page i Department of Planning's Assessment Report:

Published by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment [dpie.nsw.gov.au](http://dpie.nsw.gov.au) Title: Martins Creek Quarry Project Subtitle: State Significant Development Assessment SSD 6612 Cover image: Martins Creek Quarry view to the south-west of the West Pit © State of New South Wales through Department of Planning and Environment 2022. You may copy, distribute, display, download and otherwise freely deal with this publication for any purpose, provided that you attribute the Department of Planning and Environment as the owner. However, you must obtain permission if you wish to charge others for access to the publication (other than at cost); include the publication in advertising or a product for sale; modify the publication; or republish the publication on a website. You may freely link to the publication on a departmental website. **Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (October 2022) and may not be accurate, current or complete. The State of New South Wales (including the NSW Department of Planning and Environment), the author and the publisher take no responsibility, and will accept no liability, for the accuracy, currency, reliability or correctness of any information included in the document (including material provided by third parties). Readers should make their own inquiries and rely on their own advice when making decisions related to material contained in this publication.**