

Independent Planning Commission Submission Martins Creek Quarry

Introduction

Commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to express our personal views about this important matter.

We would like to address 4 aspects of the State Significant Development Assessment SSD-6612 that cause most concern.

In summary these are, in our opinion, that:

1. People have been afforded insufficient focus and importance
2. The uniqueness of the environment along the haulage route as compared to other quarries has been underplayed
3. The economic benefits of the quarry have been generalised and not quantified
4. The costs have not been quantified and have been downplayed.

1. People have been afforded insufficient focus and importance

At 500k pta, the incidence of truck movements increases significantly. At present, and since the Land and Environment Court Decision of January 2019 ([Dungog Shire Council v Hunter Industrial Rental Equipment Pty Ltd \(No 3\) \[2019\] NSWLEC 3](#)), significantly less than 150k pta has been exported by road. This being broadly in accord with Development Conditions which focused on railway ballast and transport by rail.

The Assessment mentions that around 500k pta was common for a long time, notwithstanding the questionable lawfulness of this. However, it is clear that this was subject to objection and complaint by people (over 600 submissions). This feedback has not been addressed in any adequate manner in the Assessment. No weighting or apparent consideration has been given to the lived experiences of the reported impacts already experienced by residents or business owners. Does the Department still refer to those complaints as “perceived fears”, when actually they are matters of fact?

Also, the Assessment does not specifically address the potential and actual health effects of the noise at that level of transportation. In this regard, it is not the mere

disturbance from each truck that passes a residence. It is the *ongoing nature of that noise, including the cumulative effect of those movements*.

In 2011 the World Health Organisation (WHO) released a report titled 'Burden of disease from environmental noise'.

(<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/burden-of-disease-from-environmental-noise-quantification-of-healthy-life-years-lost-in-europe>).

The studies analysed environmental noise from various sources and then looked at links to health conditions. The WHO team used the information to calculate the healthy years of life lost to 'unwanted' human induced harsh type noise.

They found that at least one million healthy years of life are lost each year in Europe alone due to noise pollution (and this figure does not include noise from industrial workplaces). The authors concluded that *'there is overwhelming evidence that exposure to environmental noise has adverse effects on the health of the population'* and ranked traffic noise second among environmental threats to public health (the first being air pollution).

Their research has shown that people living near busy roads have a higher incidence of headaches, take more sleeping pills and sedatives, are more prone to minor accidents, and are more likely to seek various medical treatments for cardiovascular disease, anxiety, sleep disturbance. Children may suffer cognitive impairment.

It appears that continual type noise sets off the body's acute stress response, which raises blood pressure and heart rate, potentially mobilising a state of hyper arousal. It is this response that can lead to cardiovascular disease and other health issues.

The authors also noted that while other forms of pollution are decreasing, noise pollution is increasing.

If this expansion is approved at recommended levels, the new additional noise may (and even likely will) be perceived as louder, as bad experiences from the past are brought back from the time when the non compliant operations were taking place. This will become more likely due to the feedback given previously (lived experiences) but not effectively acted upon. Trust is low.

Compared to say 15 years ago, nothing in the infrastructure world has changed along the haulage route, except for the Flat Road upgrade.

However, a lot of other things have changed, including population growth, vehicle movements, shopping increase in Paterson and trips to Maitland and East Maitland.

Nothing in the Assessment provides meaningful answers to the additional issues that come with more truck movements. The proposals for mitigation (conditions), in our opinion, are symbolic only. They will have minimal effect on impact of the huge truck movements of 280 per day, even if all are adhered to.

The demographics of the population do not appear to have been addressed, in particular the ageing population and increase in school age children (about 40% of population). Already it can be a risky proposition getting from a parked car to the Paterson shops when big vehicles are about. Many children wait along the route for school busses and the aged have decreased mobility.

The SIA obviously has had problems that were alluded to by the Newcastle University. The Department just explained these away as being of no significance because of their own “in house experts”.

Overall, paragraph 280 of the Assessment contains this evaluation: *“On balance, the Department considers that the benefits of the Project outweigh its residual costs.”* Presumably the impact on people overall amount to “residual costs” which, to us, just about sums up the apparent relatively low value of people as against economic gain.

2. The uniqueness of the environment along the haulage route as compared to other quarries has been underplayed

It seems that Martins Creek Quarry is the only one in NSW that doesn't have ready access to a major highway. Examples being Karuah and Allandale. Therefore the road haulage roads pass through villages, by residential properties & recreational land.

The proposed haulage routes do not provide the protections and facility of major transport highways including:

- barriers against noise, mostly earthworks or fencing
- multiple lanes for passing safely
- special pavement surfaces for longevity & noise reduction in sensitive areas
- perimeter fencing for safety and security.

This uniqueness should mean that extra protection is given to people and the environment. Given that other routes to and from the quarry are not available, this protection should be afforded by setting road haulage to a minimal level.

The Assessment at paragraph 269 refers to the “balance of the impacts on the community with the viability of the quarry”. No detail of *all* the impacts on the community have been provided (given that objections over the years have not been detail referenced). No detail as to what constitutes a viable quarry operation have been given.

Further the Assessment at paragraph 269 says “Traffic volumes generated by the Project would not result in a change to the existing levels of service for roads along the primary haulage route.” This is not so and has not been since the Land and Environment Court decision of January 2019.

The Department says that the Quarry is ideally suited and placed to meet the needs of industry etc. It is NOT so suited, being a “one out” compared to other quarries.

Daracon could easily haul almost all product by rail but it chooses not to do so because of higher costs. So their saving in costs will mean increased and unfair burden on the community.

A risk analyses is an imperative. The Likelihood of Occurrence (e.g. accident, injury, damage) needs to be aligned with the Consequences of such.

3. The economic benefits of the quarry have been not quantified and generalised

The economic benefits are described in general terms only. For example at paragraphs 278 and 279. There is no evidence whatsoever of the level of these benefits. What would be the effect, for example, if the quarry closed? Apart from Daracon's financial position of course. The main effect would be that the noise amenity of Paterson would significantly improve. The Department's statement at paragraph 145 to the contrary is just wrong. The multitude of community feedback given over the years is testament to this.

As the quarry's operations returned to lawful status following the Land and Environment Court decision of January 2019, what happened? A minimal amount was exported by road, well short of the 500k pta sought and supplied earlier. The sky did not fall in. Whatever additional demand there was for the material was satisfied elsewhere. And this was in a time of high construction demand. Why can't operations stay around this level?

In a project proposal it is common industry practice to ask "what are the implications of doing NOTHING?". That is not approving anything that extends past the current Court approved regime. The Department did not address this. If they had they would have found that very little change would happen except to the profit levels of Daracon.

Finally, where did the 500k come from? It came from Daracon's original ambit claim of 1.5m tpa, which later became 1m tpa in a thinly disguised attempt to be reasonable. The Department's support of the 500k has NO basis in mathematics, logic or in any methodology.

4. The costs have not been quantified and have been downplayed

The costs to the community have not been set out in such a way that they can be measured to some extent, hopefully objectively. In any project it is normal practice for costs to be assessed against benefits so that the decision makers can determine an appropriate course. How has the Department "carefully weighed the benefits against the residual costs" (paragraph 280)? They have not even attempted to do this and continue to deny the reality that at around 500k, the situation has been intolerable for those living along the haulage route and around the quarry.

Conclusion

It is evident that the Department has not used accepted project management methodologies and quantitative analyses. They have, apparently, heavily relied upon Daracon's submissions for both the levels of production, mode of transport and conditions.

The Department's support for the Daracon proposal is unfathomable and we ask "why"?

Daracon's proposal for a general quarry is simply incompatible with the surrounding residences, land uses, small village, the number of people living along the haulage route and the basic nature of the route.

We submit that having regard to the above and all the lived experience feedback received over many years, the total road haulage of 500k tpa is excessive. We submit that the total haulage by road be limited to no more than 150k tpa.