

Bylong Coal Project

Good morning all members of the commission.

Firstly, let me say that the views I present today are my personal views and represent those of a local community member and as the Principal of Kandos Public School. They are not representative of my employer the Department of Education.

I cannot speak on behalf of the environmental aspects of this project – there are people that are more intelligent in the world than I on such an important topic. What I do feel is important is that decisions are made with balanced opinion and with contextual information.

As the Principal of Kandos Public School I see directly, on a daily basis, the considerable impact that the repeated closure of industry and business is having on the wider Kandos/Rylstone area.

Since 2011 Major industry closures have put immense pressure on families and the local economy:

- Kandos Cement works
- Big Rim
- Charbon Collieries
- The recent announcement of Sibelco Australia moving its Charbon plant to Galong and all other associated industry support structures (that have provided significant economic support to the area in the past)

The economic and social impact of these losses have been significant. The social impacts of this down turn alone have created an atmosphere of disillusionment as many well-respected (long term) working families have been forced to move to find employment. With the movement of these families, Kandos Public School has been classified as a low-socio economic school.

A measure of disadvantage used to classify Kandos Public School as a low socio-economic school is the Family Occupation Employment Index. In the past 4 years this has hovered around 150 index points, what does this mean? Well over 50% of our students are place in the bottom quartile of social disadvantage Australia wide.

This trend has also created a vicious cycle as population drops, the economic viability of the region is greatly impacted something local schools are seeing in our current significant downward enrolment trends that put further pressure on the local community as more families are forced to uproot. Currently in my context enrolment growth is at negative 9%. So as students move on we are not replacing them and this has seen the school lose executive and teaching positions. As an educator it is my mission to equip students with the skills to contribute in society in meaningful and productive ways when they leave school.

In my opinion, the significant amount of disengagement we are seeing from our youth can be strongly attributed to a lack of opportunities to enter careers and I have personally seen a worrying trend towards a substantial amount of our youth showing no ambition to do anything in life, in my opinion a result of an inability to find employment. In the past 4 years I have seen a dramatic rise in child protection reports in the local area. This social disengagement has a direct impact on student welfare with a major focuses at Kandos Public turning towards wellbeing programs that are catering for physical care and social awareness. With the economic downturn, local services which support our families are no longer available seeing parents travelling for dental, physio, occupational therapy expertise.

As a local for some 28 years, who has raised children in a country town, it is vital to give them opportunities to participate in cultural, sporting and social experiences to build well rounded

citizens. Unfortunately, the economic down turn has impacted directly on those opportunities in Kandos. Without the population base, you do not field teams and interest groups, you don't have the parents to run organisations and this leads to reduced opportunities which in turn breeds social dislocation.

Again in the interest of a balanced argument – If the establishment of the Bylong Coal Project is successful... I would like to encourage Kepco and the local community to develop long term social and economic plans to ensure that we don't have to rely on mining as our only major income into the future. Mining is not sustainable and as a community the Bylong Coal Project provides what I consider as the last chance to economically save our communities and to have the opportunity to work on developing sustainable industries --- a critical focus that we must take responsibility for.

I support the Bylong Coal project as I personally believe it will provide necessary social, economic and long term educational/skills growth benefits that will ensure our communities don't continue to experience the current detrimental downturn. However we need to hold the accountable for guaranteeing best practice for environmental issues and employment opportunities.

Thankyou for your time and good luck with your deliberations.