

Wendy Wales

**United Wambo Open Cut Coal Mine Project (SSD 7142) and associated modifications (DA 305-7-2003 MOD 16 and DA 177-8-2004 MOD 3)- D539-18 public meeting**

I would like to acknowledge the Wanaruah people who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay my respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to other indigenous people who are present.

My name is Wendy Wales. I registered to speak in December on behalf of myself and separately on behalf of The Denman, Aberdeen, Muswellbrook Scone Healthy Environment Group. I felt so naïve when the last IPC Meeting was postponed due to Commissioners conflicts of interest. It seemed more than a coincidence that there were Department of Planning whistle blowers drawing attention to such conflicts within the Department of Planning.

Since then I have tried to become familiar with the criteria Commissioners independently use to determine that it is OK to allow a new mine or mine expansion. I expected to find a clause stating a public meeting was necessary for we victims' mental health, like a victim impact statement. A cathartic opportunity for us to express our grievances. I should have expected

***The clause 12AB NON-DISCRETIONARY DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR MINING***

*(1) The object of this clause is to identify development standards on particular matters relating to mining that, if complied with, prevents the consent authority from requiring more onerous standards for those matters (but that does not prevent the consent authority granting consent even though any such standard is not complied with) sic.*

Seems to say it all.

I am further perplexed as to why we are playing this charade. The part of the registration form to speak today that asks if I am directly affected by the development gets right up my nose. YES, I am directly affected, we all are.

I have worked as a Biology teacher in the Upper Hunter over the last 20 years.

The old adage about the best way to learn is to teach, I have found to be true. While no expert, every year I taught evolution and evolution of Australian Biota to HSC students I gained a deeper and clearer understanding of the significance of what we have in Australia, as our birthright. All that change and adaptation taking place over millions of years, to yield such a unique continent of diverse plants and animals, much of which is still unidentified. And after 200 years we are lucky enough to still have some of it at our doorstep.

In the time I have lived in the Upper Hunter, I have been able to do quite a bit of bushwalking and have really enjoyed our landscape with other naturalists, adventurers and explorers, which has sharpened my eye to the diversity in our region.

Unfortunately though, our capacity to destroy our natural heritage is accelerating with increased mechanical capacity and an appalling ignorance. I recently had the opportunity to fly from West Canada across to New York, and later on the same trip,

North Germany to Rome. We had window seats and daylight and were able to see the scale of human agricultural impact on the landscape for both flights. It made me realize that we are so lucky in Australia, to have wild places and remnant bush, that we should avoid further destruction of our landscape and devote ourselves to conservation and sustainable living. This will be difficult enough even if we had unity of purpose in Australia and the world.

Far from conserving what we have, the WAMBO modifications take out another 670ha, including 247 ha of a *critically endangered ecological community -Central Hunter Valley Eucalypt Forest*. I wonder that anyone one is allowed to touch critically endangered communities.

Once this coal is mined it then becomes part of a global environmental problem, no longer sequestered carbon it will be burnt and become carbon dioxide that needs recapturing.

Well such is the power of the fossil fuel industry and the misinformation by the popular press that we have seen successive Prime Ministers fall whenever they have tackled lowering our emissions.

In December I wrote "The floods in Sydney last week and the multiple bushfires in Queensland were all part of the same extreme weather event predicted to become more frequent as a consequence of global warming, that is from more energy in the system.

Commissioners and entourage, you are lucky to be coming to Singleton on a day when the sky looks clear. We, who live here, are so grateful for the cleaning effect of the rain. While much more rain is needed to break the drought further up the valley, it has settled the some of the air pollution. Psychologically it is a real endurance living with filthy skies during very hot days. The hotter the spring, summer and autumn the dustier it gets. During my membership of the Upper Hunter Air Quality Monitoring Network it was observed that dust tends to become an issue when the temperatures hits 28°C. But even with the rain and lower temperatures Warkworth, Singleton, Camberwell and NW Muswellbrook are registering PM10 levels that take them below the very good category. Clearly air quality in the Upper Hunter cannot improve by putting in another open cut mine. We are saturated. Camberwell experienced 13 PM10 exceedances in July this year, does Jerry's Plains have to look forward to this as their future? Further afield the dust becomes incremental for the already saturated background."

In January 2019 Richard Flannagan wrote *Australian summers, once a time of innocent pleasure, now are to be feared, to be anticipated not with joy but with dread, a time of discomfort, distress and, for some, fear that lasts not a day or a night but weeks and months. Power grids collapse, dying rivers vomit huge fish kills, while in the north, in Townsville, there are unprecedented floods, and in the south heat so extreme it pushes at the very edge of liveability has become everyday.*

It feels modifications and new pits, such as WAMBO's, come in like, "prices are up, We'll just get this out before any one notices. Lets tidy this up and get a bit more coal out here while we can, before there's real action as a result of the unfolding climate change catastrophes. North Queensland had record high temperatures late November with multiple devastating bushfire consequences, at the same time, Sydney was flooding. Also, out of the accepted bushfire season the devastating bushfires in California which took out the town of Paradise including 14,000 homes. The Great Barrier Reef has none of the diversity it had when I first dived there in the seventies.

I have been to many PACs and a few IPC "Public Meetings" and have been told that the Commissioners make a determination some how based on submissions. I have not understood what criteria could be being applied given the weight of social and environmental evidence presented to the commissioners. The social and environmental costs must be built into the economic calculations, for example if the cost of filling a void renders the project unviable, surely the project is economically unviable, full stop? Why should our kids have to find the solutions to this while they are already in the depths of dealing with all the other environmental problems?

The amount of time, energy and money spent staging these IPC days would be so much better spent on building unity and sustainability as we cooperatively tackle the social and environmental issues of our times, there is work to be done by everyone!!

I care for the future of the Upper Hunter and the planet and urge you Commissioners to not approve this application. Thank you.