

Vickery P.C 512119  
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The Country Women's Association of NSW was formed in 1922.

Our organisation is arguably the most influential women's organisation in New South Wales, working to improve the conditions of women and families in rural NSW.

At our 2018 State Conference, Our State Patron, His Excellency The General, The Hon. David Hurley, said of Country Women's Association:

"You've been the backbone, and to some extent the saviour, of generations of families that live in some of the harshest and driest agrarian land. The Country Women's Association makes it possible for families to continue to live in those regions."

<https://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/5371935/political-heavyweights-attend-the-cwa-conference-opening-in-armidale/>

Our Maules Creek Branch was formed in 1923. Our Branch has some members with one or more of their family working in the coal industry, including Whitehaven Coal.

We acknowledge this. People need jobs.

Towards the Vickery Extension EIS, our position is contained in the CWA Just Transitions policy- that is...

That the Country Women's Association of NSW supports positive action on climate change by calling for and supporting the implementation of a plan for transforming regions, communities and workers from fossil fuel extraction, processing and burning sectors to new, inclusive and sustainable economies."

Members have overwhelmingly supported a move away from coal dependent regions and an openness to new economically, socially, environmentally and climatically responsible possibilities.

We object to the Vickery Coal Extension.

Our community's experience is painful and we do not want to see this pain spread further.

In 2011, the Maules Creek Branch made a submission to the Maules Creek Coal mine EIS.

Our submission outlined our fears regarding health impacts, pollution, climate breakdown and water loss. Disappointingly our fears have come to pass.

We feared that the Namoi Valley could become the next Hunter Valley.

The Muswellbrook and Singleton areas have the worst air quality in the State.

A place where there are many days of the year when asthmatics and the infirmed are recommended to stay indoors.

This is fast on the way to becoming a reality for the Namoi Valley, with the most recent OEH rating of air quality in this region being ranked as "Poor".

We don't see how this is going to improve with the approval of more mines in this valley.

Apart from this Vickery megamine, if you are not aware, we can reveal that the largest mine, Maules Creek, is already in the process of planning its next expansion to the north of the current footprint. This will bring dust and blasting impacts even closer to our residences, farms, and the public school.

This expansion agenda not going to stop with Vickery.

Today's hearing for the Vickery Extension EIS, is another step in reducing the quality of the environment we all live in.

You, the Commissioners, have immense power in your hands to determine the fate of not only the town of Boggabri, but all of

those who live along the proposed railway route and our region as a whole.

The decision you make will impact the health and financial fortunes of families in the area, a grave responsibility.

Therefore, we do not want to see any Fast-tracking of the IPC process. We are concerned about the last-minute resignations from the Panel and the lack of thoroughness in the Department of Planning and Whitehaven, interviews with the IPC panel.

Nonetheless-

The DPE has put Key issues to the IPC - (These focus on the rail spur and the floodplain, flood modelling, groundwater modelling and management of sediment dams; noise and air modelling; Koalas, the final void, the use of mined land, and "social impacts". )

and has also noted "other and additional issues"- (ie. Aboriginal and Historical heritage, greenhouse gas emissions, traffic and transport, social and economic.)

We ask you- once you address these and if the IPC commissioners recommend approval with conditions, what message do you send to our region?

Yesterday you heard the CEO pitched the Vickery project based on projections of coal consumption growth in Asia that will lead to more than 2 degrees global warming & a failure to meet our Paris Agreement goals.

We cannot agree that it is just - for current decision makers- to continue building this regional coal economy for our children – A legacy that will result in our region carrying the reputational burden of being climate wreckers.

The CEO- also - as you may recall, described the company to you the IPC commissioners as a pure-play coal company- a one trick multi-national. It considers itself to be low cost. But to us the

company has proven to be very high cost.

This is a company that has been given by our governments against the will of the community-

a mining lease in a critically endangered, public forest at a time when the world is crying out for old growth carbon sinks,

a company that can apparently afford to buy 1,000's ha of local farm land and move out long-term food producing families,

a company that has moved a major mining operation into Maules Creek and then denied it has caused any impacts in our water system

a company that has been given the ability to self-report and not be subject to approval conditions that are objective and measurable

a company that paid no tax on a \$2billion plus income, and

a company that is then given the opportunity by government to take local public school kids on "science tours"?

One tour, for example- under the banner FutureEDU was provided by Whitehaven coal to the Maules Creek primary school students.

It took the children onsite and then gave them a lesson on how science and industry experts conduct air quality and noise monitoring.

This tour was then reported in the local paper as a perfect fit with the school's Environmental Change and Sustainability unit.

In terms of education for the future this is rock bottom.

A Non-tax paying multinational, the lowest cost coal producer should not be a part of futures education in our region- the government should not allowing this privileged access.

This company has been given enough.

The families in our region deserve a less risky basis for their jobs future.

Therefore, when considering the Vickery mine, we request that you take into account the environmental track record of the Whitehaven Coal company, which I draw to your attention. Whitehaven Coal was penalised by having its Environmental Protection Licence re-rated at level 3 High Risk in 2017, a risk level shared by only two other coal mines out of 49 in NSW.

Despite the company overcoming this immediate crisis in its environmental standing, there is a lengthy history of complaints and then internal investigations by both Dept of Planning and the EPA. We ask that you look into these issues.

At Maules Creek in 2012 the holding of a PAC hearing resulted in the losing merits appeal rights. It was the first project to be subject to this rule. History is repeating itself here today.

As we understand that by holding a public IPC hearing the community cannot take the proponent to a court to appeal the merits of the approval.

Therefore, we call on the Panel to thoroughly consider all of the evidence that is presented today, and not to shy away from seeking to validate or conduct further investigations because of your time limits.

Such major industrial complexes like a major coal mine, and coal washer, crusher and loader complex should have an on-site government representative to observe the operations closely, not attempt to investigate after the fact, from long distances.

Among its many impacts, Whitehaven threatens the groundwater and surface flow of the Namoi River. Maules Creek farmers have faced loss of groundwater never before experienced in over 100 years of records. The far-reaching effects of such a catastrophe go beyond agriculture, beyond household use, but even to the extent

of endangerment of the community because there may not be adequate water for fire-fighting.

Reading the EIS, and the transcript of Mr Young and Mr O'Donoghue's interview with the previous panel members, I note much discussion about the drawdown being from the Permian rock source, not the groundwater.

My, how history repeats itself. This is the exact same argument we face at Maules Creek. The valley has lost its groundwater, and we too are embroiled in an unending debate about whether the mine is the cause, with the same argument – water is coming from the Permian rock source, not the groundwater aquifer.

Now is the time to invoke the Precautionary Principle, and not let this happen again.

We have perused many of the submissions in favour of the Vickery Extension. Overwhelmingly, the submissions are short and focus on jobs. There is a strong theme which appears in the pro-approval submissions – a belief that Whitehaven Coal has an excellent environmental track record.

And by the way, I note that the previous panel members have discussed the issue of a Kamillaroi Highway overpass. The last time this multinational company promised an overpass was when it was trying to gain approval for the Tarrawonga mine extension. The overpass has still not been built.

And a final word on the interruptions to the passenger train. Country women, particularly our older members and families, value the passenger train to Sydney. This is critical for medical appointments and independent travel. This service is regularly and with very little notice interrupted by coal trains and late or worse replaced with a bus. This social impact is unacceptable.

Yesterday the ARTC's spokesperson Michael Clancy said in support of this project "of the 250 trains in the Hunter Valley only half are

coal trains.”

We are in the Namoi Valley, not the Hunter Valley. And I can report that a Leard Forest Research Node investigations into train movements over a 24-hour period conducted November 2017 – peak harvest time- recorded 23 trains.

1 passenger train, 1 cancelled passenger train, 2 freight trains, 2 grain trains and the remaining 18 trains were coal trains.

Despite the NSW State government spending \$62 million in Gunnedah for a rail overpass, our children and families do not need the health impacts of 125 daily coal trains and the associated explosion in mining that will accompany this.

Thank you.