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Hume Coal Project SSD7172 and Berrima Rail Project SSD7171

The Greens opposition to coal mining needs no introduction. We've covered it in detail in our submission and you've probably heard us mention it here and there in other contexts

There's no economic benefit from coal mining that is worth the damage. The damage to our environment, our water, our skies, is obvious. The damage to our people, our towns, and our cities, is less obvious but very very real.

This couldn't be more true of the Hume Coal project, with its paltry 'economic benefit' of \$373 million over 28 years. About \$13 million per year. That's less than Council's annual road budget. A drop in the ocean of the NSW economy. Hardly worth trashing the place for.

Opposition to this mine is just common sense. It doesn't add up. The locals don't want it. That's clear from the number of submissions against it. Council are against it. It contributes nothing to the local area while doing plenty of damage and risking even more. Most importantly, after a detailed assessment of huge amounts of information, the Department is against it. Common sense says that is enough reason not to do it.

The impacts of this mine at a local and regional level are noted in the department's report as significant. That's a fairly understated, bureaucratic way of saying 'enormous.' There's quite a few impacts discussed in the assessment, but I'll focus on water since that's the main one in the Department's assessment.

Hume Coal's own modelling counts over 100 bores that will experience drawdown. Even before they did the modelling properly they admitted that. That's a technical way of saying there will be less water in the bores, because it's flowed down into the mine. Some of these bores will be drawn down 20m! Put like that it doesn't sound so bad. They should call it for what it is. A destruction of the aquifer. This is the most significant damage to an aquifer of any mining project ever assessed in NSW, regardless of uncertainty in the modelling. Common sense says that is enough reason not to do it.

This isn't just about a few bores on a few small farms though. That aquifer is part of the Sydney drinking water catchment. It's bad enough when mining happens in some

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far off place and only affects a small community. This one affects millions. We all remember the times when Sydney's nearly been out of water in dry years. And Hume Coal is proposing to destroy a highly productive aquifer that feeds Sydney's water catchment? Common sense says that's a bad idea.

Sydney has an incredible area of protected land to protect the drinking water catchment. Any activity in this catchment is carefully assessed and managed. There are strict rules for something as small as a septic tank on a rural property in the catchment area. That applies as far away as Braidwood! It beggars belief that the rules could be this strict for a septic tank, but a mine that destroys the aquifer is being considered?

And there's precedent for this sort of damage. There is increasing evidence that the Tahmoor Colliery has caused Thirlmere Lakes to dry up, and the beds of nearby rivers to crack, losing huge amounts of precious water that should be flowing into Warragamba.

Hume Coal has proposed a few things to try to deal with this damage, such as deepening bores or providing alternative supplies. The Department foresees a range of difficulties with these proposals, from technical feasibility to protracted dispute resolution. As I said before, the locals don't want this mine. And of course, these do nothing to replace the flows lost from the Sydney catchment. More common sense reasons to reject this proposal.

Then there is the water management in the mine itself. Hume Coal want to store 'produced' water inside the mine tunnels rather than treating it and discharging it into Sydney's catchment. While this seems like it avoids impacts on the catchment, it's effectively creating a time bomb where failure of the bulkheads could lead to 'catastrophic flooding, significant loss of life or property and damage to the environment.' And all that upstream of significant population centres, and the main water supply storage for 5 million people. Not a good idea.

There have now been ten groundwater experts considering the project. They are from the Department, from Hume Coal, and from community groups like Coal Free Southern Highlands. The Department's recommendation against the mine is therefore based on a pretty thorough analysis. The mine doesn't add up.

Against all of this, Hume Coal offers a paltry \$373 million of economic benefit (which the department disputes) and a few jobs. Of course jobs are good, but jobs destroying aquifers, polluting waterways and contributing to climate change are hardly good

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jobs.

Put it this way, if someone offered you a low-paid job demolishing your own house, would you take it?