

- Good morning, Commissioners and Council Assisting. I'd like to pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and to their leaders; past, present and emerging.
- I'm a veterinarian with 30 years' experience in equine reproductive practice in the Hunter Valley and internationally. I'm the Managing Director the Scone Equine Hospital, a member of the Australian and New Zealand College of Veterinary Scientists in Equine Medicine and the president of the Hunter Thoroughbred Breeders Association.
- It is as the president of the Hunter Thoroughbred Breeders that I speak to you today. I would like to explain who we are, why we matter and why we are so concerned about this proposal.

Who are we?

- The HTBA represents some 200 organisations and many individuals who make their living from breeding horses and the associated activities in the valley.
- We have a 200-year history of sustainable farming in the Hunter. Our business is producing the world's best equine athletes. Our members have been doing it for generations and we are recognised around the country and around the world for what we do.
- We have many of the best horse farms in Australia. Studs such as Arrowfield, Newgate, Vinery, Segenhoe and Yarraman Park are central to the history, culture and economy of the region. They are recognised as world-class for the horses they produce, and they will be directly affected by this proposal.

- Godolphin is one of the largest and most successful horse breeders in the world. They own stud farms in Europe, America, The Middle East and Japan. Their presence in the Hunter Valley is clear evidence that this is one of the best environments in Australia to breed horses.

Why do we Matter?

- Our industry has been recognised by the NSW Government as a strategically important agricultural industry. It's been mapped as a Critical Industry Cluster, protected from coal seam gas mining, and the NSW Government has repeatedly committed to protect it.
- Our industry is world recognised and world renowned. It is internationally connected, vertically integrated and concentrated in a critical mass in the upper Hunter Valley. It has the people, infrastructure, horses and the environment necessary for a Critical Industry Cluster and has been so recognised and declared by the New South Wales State Government.
- The Hunter's breeding industry is the largest in Australia and the second largest in the world. The Hunter is considered one of three centres of excellence of Thoroughbred breeding, alongside Kentucky in the USA, and Newmarket in the United Kingdom.
- One in every two thoroughbreds born in Australia are bred in the Upper Hunter. Eighty to 90 per cent of the horses auctioned at yearling sales around the country every year are the progeny of Hunter Stallions. Eighty to 90 per cent of Australia's thoroughbred exports are the progeny of Hunter Stallions. Fifty per cent of the races along the entire eastern seaboard on any day of the week contain the progeny of Hunter Stallions. We are Australia's largest producer, supplier, and exporter of Thoroughbreds.
- Our industry makes an annual contribution to the Hunter region of 565 million dollars , to the state of 2.6 billion, and to the national economy of over five billion.

- We are the largest agricultural employer in the region with over 5000 direct jobs. The industry contributes to 53,000 jobs across the state and around 250,000 across the nation.
- Racing is one of Australia's oldest sports and is part of the fabric of urban and regional communities across the country. It is the second-most popular sport in Australia, with over two million attendances every year. In New South Wales alone, there are 134 race clubs across the state.
- The Thoroughbred industry is a substantial **agricultural** industry. Its contribution to the economy of this region is twice the value of irrigated agriculture, four and a half times the value of dairy and 10 times the value of beef cattle. We are not a niche industry – we are a central component of the region's and the state's economy.

PAUSE

- Previous Planning Assessment Commissions have recognised that coal mining and international scale horse breeding operations are incompatible land uses and cannot co-exist in close proximity. Previous Commissions have actually stopped other open-cut operations such as Bickham and Drayton South from being developed in this sort of close proximity to stud farms and they have recommended that buffers or preservation zones be implemented to protect the industry.
- Commissioners, it is not an accident that the horses, the farms, the expertise and the people are concentrated here.
- We have the perfect environment to breed and rear horses. It is an agricultural landscape with the climate, topography, soil and water that we need. This is not hyperbole; its veracity is demonstrated by a 200-year history of regularly producing some of the best horses in the world.

- However, to continue to produce the best, requires that we have **all of these factors**; and the environment and surrounding landscape are central to our success and our reputation. Evidence on the threats this project poses to the environment and landscape in which we operate will be provided to you by our experts. It is worth noting that similar evidence from other such projects has been recognised by previous Commissions as an existential threat to our industry.

PAUSE

Why are we concerned about the Mt Pleasant project?

- We're worried because our industry is **so sensitive** to threats of open-cut mining – both operationally and reputationally. Impacts on the industry's reputation affect our business, they affect future investment, and they affect the jobs in our industry. This is a fact that has been recognised by 5 previous Planning Assessment Commissions and 2 previous Gateway Panels.
- We're worried because this project is proposed to encroach so close to our operations that its impacts will be visible from both Godolphin Kelvinside and Newgate Farm. It will be visible to the clients and to potential investors who travel along the New England Highway to visit our farms and make decisions on where their mares and foals should live. It will be visible to the stallion owners deciding where to locate these horses.
- We're worried because this encroachment onto previously undisturbed land, in closer proximity to our operations and the town of Aberdeen, will impair the reputation of our industry. It will hinder investment and job creation. We are already losing investment that would previously have come to the Hunter and is now going to other regions in Australia due to the impacts, perceptions and uncertainty caused by open cut mining in the region.

PAUSE

- We're worried because the proponent has no understanding of our industry, is misinformed about where our farms are located and is not concerned about the environmental consequences of their operations which will directly affect us and cannot be contained with their property boundary.
- We're worried because its air quality impacts will worsen an already bad air quality situation and will cause harm to our people, communities and horses.
- We're worried because this project will irreversibly damage the amenity of our environment and landscape which is central to our industry reputation and success.
- We're worried because the landscape at the **entrance** to the Upper Hunter's equine precinct will be substantially and permanently altered, with serious questions remaining about the successful rehabilitation of the land for agricultural use post mining .
- We're worried because after 18 years of inactivity under the previous owners, no holistic cumulative impact assessments have been done to assess the impacts on our critical industry cluster, on air quality, on surface and groundwater, or on climate change.
- We're worried because this proposal presents incomplete information, ignores the immediate environmental and social damage, is silent about the long-term costs of the project, and asks us to accept a degraded landscape and environment as its legacy for future generations.

PAUSE

- Commissioners, we understand the historical role that mining has played in the economic development of the Hunter region, but times have changed. The future of this region lies in a diverse economy and in it being home to a range of sustainable industries. Agricultural industries such ours are part of the future of the region; destructive, polluting, irreparable

projects, such as this one, with significant disadvantages to the environment, the neighbours and the community do not have a long-term future and should not be approved at the expense of sustainable industries.

- Commissioners, given that **no assessment of the impacts of this proposal on our industry has been made**, we encourage you to come and see some of our operations that will be directly affected, for yourselves, before reaching your determination.

PAUSE

- The HTBA opposes this proposal and asks you to refuse it.