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COMMENT

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I have written, and re-written, this submission many times over the course of the last few weeks. As I have read through more and more of the documentation informing the Department's recommendation, I have gained new insights which has of course raised new questions.

My position has also changed, and changed back, many times over this same period. Early in the campaign I was vehemently opposed to the facility "microplastics in the air", "pollutants in the adjacent streams", "toxic industry on the rolling green pastures of the Highlands" were big ideas that seemed to swallow everything, and everyone, in their path. I do not carry with me that same level of opposition, or degree of passion, today.

*The truth is: I no longer even know how I really feel about this proposal. I know how I maybe **should** feel, because I see so much of the community crying out, and fearful. But I am loathe to make decisions like this on an abundance of emotion and a modicum of data.*

So, I went looking for data. And I looked hard. But where I ended up is feeling like I still did not know enough.

Do I know more about the risk of microplastics or VOCs entering the local atmosphere than experts in emission control systems?

Do I know more about the risk of pollutants entering riparian zones or pressures placed on local sewage treatment than those who make a living working in the water industry?

Do I know more about expected impacts on traffic and road infrastructure than the folks who run models day in, day out at Transport for NSW?

Do I know more about the potential trade-offs of prioritising state development over local plans for the MVEC than Wingecarribee Council and DPHI staff?

The answer to all those questions is, from where I sit, quite obviously, 'no'. Which is not to say that others couldn't have answered 'yes' to some, while others point out that experts can get things wrong sometime.

But I can't passionately oppose something on the basis that experts make mistakes. Experts make mistakes all the time, and still I travel on planes, I drink water from the tap, I take medication.

What this all boils down to then is TRUST. We all need to trust that proponents act with honest and good intentions, that applicants offer up all relevant information honestly, that planners at the department are honest in their assessments and in disclosing any conflicts of interest.

What I see in the community is that for some reasons I might be able to pinpoint, and for some reasons that feel uncontrollable and unknowable this trust is broken.

In the current state, I find it hard to support the application because of the social and community impacts of a government giving this the green light knowing how the community feels (especially having consideration to the state of things in the world at large). On the flip side, I think it's important that trust in institutions and the people that run them is restored the world only moves forward if we have faith in experts and expertise.

This proposal may still be an opportunity to regain said trust, if the IPC can figure out how.