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24 February 2009

The Honourable Kristina Keneally
Minister for Planning
Level 35 Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister

**Response to the Strategic Review of Impacts of Potential Underground Coal Mining
in the Wyong Local Government Area**

The Central Coast's Water Supply

The Inquiry's recommendations do not adequately respond to risks to the Central Coast's water catchment. The Inquiry's report acknowledges that there is a lack of information relating to groundwater the Wyong LGA in general (p2), however it then uses available data to predict that mining activity will not significantly impact on groundwater. Basing this recommendation on incomplete data creates an unacceptable risk to the Central Coast's water supply.

Similarly, the report states that the Panel's principal source of technical information on the possible effects on surface water was the proponent (p59). Further, the report states that conclusions on subsidence are consistent with conventional subsidence engineering (p60). The Central Coast's water catchment requires the highest degree of certainty, yet conventional subsidence engineering has a history of failure, as is evident in many instances where subsidence has damaged streams and resulted in reduced flows.

The Inquiry appears to have accepted the proponent's inconclusive information that does not clearly demonstrate the absence of significant risks. However, it has not acted upon the advice from the Department of Environment and Climate Change, which on p23 of its submission called for risk-based decision-making with prevention as a primary management consideration.

In its submission to the Inquiry, the Gosford Wyong Councils' Water Authority lists many risks such as:

- diversion of surface or ground water into mine workings
- reduction in natural stream flows
- impacts by mine water discharges
- impacts on flooding and natural flows
- impacts on riverine environments
- impacts on water supply infrastructure.

The Inquiry appears not to have taken a risk-based view of the mine's potential impacts and it was not required to nominate areas of responsibility and courses of action in the event that such impacts occur.

The Gosford Wyong Councils' Water Authority states on page two of its submission that the area's limited water resources are fully committed to meeting the demands of a growing area.

Where risk is calculated as the product of probability and consequence, the potentially extreme consequences dictate extreme caution in accepting even a slight chance of adverse impact.

The report's conclusion that the predicted subsidence is "unlikely" to significantly compromise the water supply does not provide adequate assurance. It appears from its report, that the Inquiry has not exercised due diligence in its responsibility to assess the significance of compromise to the water supply, although this was required in the first of its terms of reference.

Coal Dust

The Inquiry has not responded adequately to the social implications of coal dust.

Under the Central Coast Regional Strategy, the new Warnervale Town Centre and the Wyong Employment Zone will see significant increases in the number of people living and working within 10km of the mine's surface facilities. The Panel received and considered information from the proponent predicting that PM₁₀ coal dust could be suppressed and substantially held on site by "best practice" methods including water sprays. The report however, makes no reference to the PM_{2.5} particulate matter, which would spread more widely and pose a greater health risk.

The report states that the Panel did not receive comprehensive information on meteorological conditions (p76), although I am aware that the Australian Coal Alliance in its submission provided information on the prevailing wind patterns. The report makes statements contradictory to the information submitted, but offers no explanation of what other data was considered.

The inquiry concluded that dust impacts are a considerable concern for the community (p76) and that standards should be in line with scientific and community expectations (p77). The report calls on the Department of Environment and Climate Change to review air quality standards, particularly the existing deposited dust standard and to establish new standards for smaller particulates (p77). Under the circumstances, I believe that the Department of Planning should seek to expedite the development and implementation of these new standards.

In conclusion, I advise that I do not believe that the Inquiry has given adequate consideration to important information that was submitted and has not reached conclusions most appropriate for the development of the Central Coast. Consequently, I request that no further consideration be given to coal mining within the Wyong Local Government Area.

Yours faithfully

Greg Piper, MP
Member For Lake Macquarie