



POSITION PAPER

HUME COAL AND BERRIMA RAIL PROJECTS

BACKGROUND

The Exeter-Sutton Forest Landscape Conservation Area was listed on the National Trust Register in February, 1998. Within the Exeter/Sutton Forest Landscape Conservation Area there are also 43 properties individually listed on the National Trust Register. The Village of Berrima Urban Conservation Area was listed on the National Trust Register in May, 1976. Berrima dates from 1830 and it was listed as 'A valid, intact historic village of great urban and regional significance, the value of which is reinforced by the high quality of the surrounding natural environment'. The Berrima Memorial Park 1914-1918 Landscape Conservation Area was listed on the National Trust Register in September, 2000 for its historic and social significance. Another forty three places in Berrima are individually listed on the National Trust Register, many dating from the 1830s and 1840s.

In a July 2013 submission on a proposal for coal exploration and environmental monitoring work at "Hillview", Sutton Forest, the National Trust urged the NSW Heritage Council to refuse the Section 60 Application for these works and in that submission set out the following general principles and statements regarding potential coal mining operations in Exeter – Sutton Forest.

In the context of the history of European settlement of NSW, the Southern Highlands area has a unique social and economic role and its heritage values need recognition and protection if they are to survive into the future. These values are incompatible with the development of a coal mining landscape. The development of coal mining is problematic in the Southern Highlands due to the important subterranean aquifers in the area (which are currently exploited economically for their purity and excellent potable qualities).

Modern mining methods have been demonstrated to have potentially severe impacts upon natural elements through cracking of the substrata and subsidence. While the mining technique proposed by Hume Coal is being put forward as less likely to have these impacts, it is understood that this is a new mining process, not used before in this area and there are no demonstrable precedents by which the company's claims can be verified. Consequently, where there are major alternative values to be protected, such as occur in the Southern Highlands, the opportunity to protect these values should be seized.

The Trust notes the close proximity of the proposed mine surface infrastructure and the proposed railway extension to the historic town of Berrima. The Berrima area is known for its historic and scenic significance and the developments proposed will, in the Trust's view, impact negatively on tourism and the heritage significance of this important historic village. There is also considerable community concern at the potential for dust impacts from the coal rail-transport system.

A large proportion of the coal is believed to be of generally poor quality. Consequently, the currently proposed method of extracting the coal may prove technically difficult and expensive and may become too problematic or unsustainable. It is not unusual for mining companies to later seek approval for the use of more invasive methods, citing loss of local employment and opportunities for flow-on economic benefits as justification for such development.

Good decision-making should recognise that there are appropriate and inappropriate times and places for all things and governments today at all levels should recognise that the Exeter-Sutton Forest Area in the Southern Highlands is not a suitable place for coal mining.

NATIONAL TRUST POSITION

- The Trust believes that the major threat of the mining operation is that it will have a greater impact on the aquifer levels than indicated in the Environmental Impact Statement modelling. The mining will affect the level of the aquifer requiring existing bores to be deeper and may also effect the levels of surface water, including the many natural streams such as the Medway Rivulet, which, in addition to the bores in the area, are relied on for farm water supplies.
- The Trust is also concerned that the aquifer under the Landscape Conservation Area is considered to be extremely fragile and consequently mining activity should be considered to be very high risk. The modelling of the impact on the aquifer in the Environmental Impact Statement is designed to appear definitive and to give confidence to the reader. However, it is nonetheless theoretical and would include many assumptions in regard to the Area's geology.
- Mining does form part of the history of the Southern Highlands, but this mining has been much lower scale than currently proposed. The public image of the Southern Highlands is its tourism qualities and its scenic and rich landscapes, not for coal mining. The proposed mine is much larger than any previous mine and its above-ground infrastructure will be visible.
- While the Environmental Impact Statement does note various proposals to minimise the visual impact of the above-ground infrastructure, several important vistas will be negatively impacted including views from Medway Road, the Old Hume Highway, the motorway (Hume Highway), Mereworth Road, Oldbury Road and the properties off Golden Vale Road such as Roscoe Park.
- Tree planting to screen the mine development infrastructure will block existing views across the landscape. Additionally the tree planting will likely not mature to effectively block the view if the above-ground infrastructure till nearing the end of the 22 year life of the project. The combined visual impacts of the coal mine infrastructure and railway project are considerably greater than the low to moderate rating given in the Environmental Impact Statement. The views from private properties were not included in the Assessment and the night lighting of these developments will also impact on the landscape.

ACTION TO PROMOTE THE TRUST'S POSITION

The Trust will promote its views on this issue in the media, with the local Council, the public and the NSW government.