

**Submission
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SUSTAINABILITY OF ENERGY SUPPLY AND RESOURCES IN NSW

Organisation: Goulburn River Stone Cottages

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Submission to Environment and Planning Committee of the NSW Parliament

Please accept this submission on the Inquiry into the Sustainability of Energy Supply and Resources in NSW.

Energy and resource development in the Hunter Valley and in the Upper Goulburn River, NSW has had a sorry history of destructive consequences from short-term planning focus and project-by-project evaluation of environmental, social and health impacts. Cumulative impacts too often have been deliberately ignored and self-interest passed off as that of the wider community.

NSW urgently must choose a new path, focussed instead on a wider vision. To prepare and adapt for the challenges ahead we need to learn from past mistakes. The value and fragility of the physical and social environment on which our safety and prosperity depends has to be recognised and acted upon.

We need an intact, mutually supportive community base for volunteer organisations and individual community members to be able to report and act on environmental and social issues before problems escalate.

Developments should be assessed on the likelihood they will actively encourage and support the resilience of rural/regional communities currently depopulated by coal mining developments.

Without reliable water in the dry times, the country is effectively sterilized for all future land-use. The overriding priority must be to take prompt action to protect and sustainably manage all remaining water resources.

There is irrefutable evidence we face a challenging future fraught with great danger, but there are also new opportunities. Detailed regional planning based on environmental evidence, intergenerational equity and community interest should inform strong public leadership backed up by public investment. All of these are essential if we are to benefit from the opportunities and avoid the worst consequences of past mistakes.

Planning decisions should avoid making things worse. Stop approving new coal mining expansions and green-field developments. I note that globally many of the customers to whom NSW supplies coal are shifting to renewable energy. Renewables are now more socially acceptable, reliable and cheaper, with many aging coal fired power stations scheduled to close down. Thermal coal now relies on incumbency for its economic viability;

an illusion of strength overlays substantial uncertainty for dependants of the coal mining and power generation industries in the years to come.

The message government sends in approving new coal projects encourages local businesses to further invest in coal support ventures. This reduces the region's economic diversity and exposes rural communities to future economic shock.

Consider the example of the Powder River region of USA where coal companies facing loss of coal markets, sold out to "two dollar" companies that stripped assets. This initiated mass redundancies and put commitments to environmental remediation at risk¹.

We need to plan now to prepare for change, and to ensure that there is support for workers and a strong plan for new industries and new opportunities. Overseas experience has shown the high risk of relying on multi-national coal companies to act in the community's interest above the maximisation of profit. Regional communities should not be subject to economic shocks and negative impacts from changing markets and a failure by our governments to lead and to plan.

On the positive side, areas such as Ulan/Wollar have good quality road and rail links, high voltage power links, optic fibre cable links, access to a skilled workforce and access to reliable water. There is high potential on these mine sites for solar and wind farms, pumped hydro, solar thermal or cultivation of bio energy crops. Along with this energy producing potential are associated co-generation opportunities utilising surplus heat and energy. Without a plan all of this could end up a derelict waterless wasteland.

I am a landholder, grazier and tourism operator living in the Ulan/Goulburn River area, Mid-West Regional Council area, since 1975. I have been witness first-hand to resource and energy management that is unsustainable, including the destruction of an irreplaceable water system. If your planning recommendations are to be in any way sustainable, then the legacy of such policies to future generations (as stated in Government ESD policy) must be of overriding concern. Any developments damaging to rivers and groundwater must be rejected. Our experience trying to protect our country and ameliorate some of the worst excesses of the coal industry should provide a warning of the immense effort needed to reverse or even mitigate the damage.

Yours sincerely,

Colin & Julia Imrie

¹ <https://www.sierraclub.org/compass/2019/07/coal-mine-bankruptcies-enter-phase-2-promising-massive-layoffs-and-untreated>

<https://www.vox.com/energy-and-environment/2019/7/9/20684815/coal-wyoming-bankruptcy-blackjewel-appalachia>