

INQUIRY INTO BENEFICIAL AND PRODUCTIVE POST- MINING LAND USE

Organisation: Narrabri Shire Council

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Our Reference: 2170190 DLA :DLA
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Att. Hon. Emily Suvaal MLC, Committee Chair
Legislative Council Standing Committee on State Development
Inquiry into Beneficial and Productive Post-Mining Land Uses
Parliament of New South Wales
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
Sydney, NSW 2000

By Email: state.development@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Tuesday, 25 June 2024

**Legislative Council Standing Committee on State Development Inquiry into
Beneficial and Productive Post Mining Land Uses – Narrabri Shire Council
Submission**

Dear Hon. Emily Suvaal,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the State Development Inquiry into Beneficial and Productive Post-Mining Land Uses.

It is understood that the following terms of reference (ToRs) are applicable to the current review process:

- That the Standing Committee on State Development inquire into and report on beneficial and productive post-mining land use, and in particular:*
- (a) the benefits of having multiple successive land uses including the positive benefits for local communities and the economy, business, industry, and the broader state*
 - (b) changes in land use potential and demand in established or traditional mining areas, particularly those generated by the decarbonised economy, renewable technology, manufacturing, defence, skills, and training*
 - (c) opportunities for investment and growth in training and skills in established or traditional mining areas, including:*
 - (i) the need to reskill and or retrain current workforces*
 - (ii) the impact and effectiveness of existing and new education, training, and skills providers for mining communities*
 - (d) opportunities to encourage innovative post-mining land uses including:*
 - (i) the planning and implementation of essential supporting infrastructure for future site use*
 - (ii) the development of solar farms, pumped hydro, and other clean energy industries*
 - (iii) the compatibility of post mining land sites with commercial projects*
 - (iv) the potential of unlocking surrounding land for residential dwellings, amenities, environmental and educational facilities*
 - (v) potential exploration of former and legacy mining sites with modern mining technology to explore deposits in tailings and closed sites*
 - (vi) the development of sites for use for advanced manufacturing, commercial and industrial use*



- (e) how to ensure the benefit from innovative post mine land uses are shared between the community and mine operators*
- (f) the expectations of mining communities in relation to post-mine land use, and how to balance this with innovative reuse of existing infrastructure*
- (g) the need to develop a robust independent regulatory framework to maintain and advance best practice in this area, and*
- (h) any other related matters*

It is further noted that an Issues paper outlining the NSW Government's proposed approach to supporting coal-reliant regions and establishing the Future Jobs and Investment Authorities has been recently released for public feedback. The NSW Government's plan for the Future Jobs and Investment Authorities involves establishing authorities for the Hunter, Illawarra, Central West and North West. The local authorities will be made up of a wide and inclusive range of representatives from local government, community groups, unions and the mining industry.

The Issues Paper foreshadows the establishment of a Future Jobs and Investment Board and Advocate to focus on coordination, transparency and accountability. This is intended to ensure locally led input and bespoke advice drives Government decision making to support workers and deliver new jobs and investment in coal-reliant regions. It is understood that consultation on the corresponding Issues Paper will close on Friday, 12 July 2024. A summary of Council's response to the Discussion Paper is included within item (h) for the Committee's convenience.

Local Context

Narrabri Shire is a [local government area](#) in the [North West Slopes](#) region of NSW. The primary settlement of Narrabri is located adjacent to the [Namoi River](#) and at the confluence of the [Newell](#) and [Kamilaroi Highways](#). The local government area (LGA) is strategically positioned halfway between Sydney and Brisbane, and is considered to be resource-rich. Key local industries include mining and agriculture. At the last census (2021) the resident population was 12,721 persons.

Narrabri Shire Council's vision is articulated in the Community Strategic Plan as follows:

"Narrabri Shire will be a strong and vibrant regional growth centre providing a quality living environment for the entire Shire community."

The township of Narrabri is considered to be one of the most flood prone settlements in NSW. The community of Wee Waa, located west of Narrabri, is periodically completely isolated by flood waters for long periods (up to two weeks) and is protected by a ring levee. Narrabri Shire contains a number of vulnerable and at-risk communities that are flood-affected. These communities have a high Aboriginal population, low socio-economic base and are also ageing in nature.

Council has an extensive rural road network of 2,343,787 metres in length with a total area of 13,310,299m². Like many rural and regional Councils in NSW, it provides a broad range of services, including but not limited to, drinking water provision, sewerage treatment plants, waste management, community services and recreational facilities within multiple settlements across a local government area of 13,031 square kilometres in size.

The Narrabri local government area (LGA) has diversified from its traditional agricultural base of grain, cotton, wool, beef and prime lamb production to coal mining and gas extraction and exploration. The advent of these new resource-based industries in conjunction with ancillary business is providing a breadth and depth of job opportunities for the Shire. Narrabri supports 6,949 jobs and has an annual economic output of \$5.671 billion. The Mining industry sector makes the greatest contribution to economic output in the region, which at \$3.5 B accounts for 62.31% of total output.

This industry sector is also the largest employer with 1,501 jobs which represents 21.6% of total employment within the region. A total of five coal mines are currently operational within the Shire. These include:

- Narrabri Underground Coal Mine (Whitehaven)
- Boggabri Coal (Idemitsu)
- Maules Creek Coal (Whitehaven)
- Vickery Coal Mine (Whitehaven)
- Tarrawonga Coal Mine (Whitehaven)

Several Coal Mines are also at closure stage, including the Canyon Creek Coal Mine. The Tarrawonga Mine is also nearing closure with the planned final land use being woodland as well as land suitable for pasture, and as at 1 January 2022, approximately 157 out of a total 568 hectares of woodland has been rehabilitated.

Narrabri Shire Council provides the following feedback to the Standing Committee in relation to this important inquiry:

(a) the benefits of having multiple successive land uses including the positive benefits for local communities and the economy, business, industry, and the broader state

The Narrabri Shire community has benefited from a diverse economic base. As detailed previously, mining is a significant contributor to the local economy.

A significant challenge for the community is that once a mine reaches end of life the land is typically used for lower order uses that do not generate significant employment numbers. These include extensive agricultural activities and rehabilitated land to be used for biodiversity and environmental purposes.

As outlined by the Reserve Bank of Australia in their March 2020 Bulletin on *Regional Variation in Economic Conditions* (Price, 2020), regions with greater economic diversity have greater resilience and ability to adapt to structural change:

"The literature identifies a number of regional characteristics that are associated with adaptability, many of which fall into the following four broad categories:

- ***Industry diversity.*** Regions with a more diverse economic base can transfer resources more easily across industries. Any industry-specific shock should be more muted in regions with multiple industries, since resources can flow to industries that did not experience the shock.
- ***Human capital.*** The knowledge, experiences and skills of people within a region affect the region's capacity to take advantage of new economic opportunities, for example through innovation or starting new businesses.

These characteristics will also affect firms' decisions to invest in the region. The supply of labour in a region is also important, though people can often move across regions if required.

- **Physical capital.** *The availability of infrastructure, equipment and technology affects a region's ability to take advantage of new economic opportunities. The presence of physical capital that improves connectivity and access to resources both within the region and with other regions/countries should lower costs and increase productivity, which increases firms' willingness to invest in the region.*
- **Financial capital.** *Regions with higher incomes and wealth or greater access to credit tend to be better placed to manage a decline in economic conditions and take advantage of new economic opportunities.*

Compared with capital cities, regional areas tend to have: a less diverse industry structure; a less educated population; lower connectivity with other regions and markets; and lower income and wealth In particular, mining regional areas are less connected with other regions and have lower industry diversity. In addition to having significant exposures to the recent drivers of structural change, regional areas are also more likely to have characteristics associated with lower adaptability to structural change. Overall, this suggests that these regions have taken longer to adapt to recent structural developments."

A copy of the bulletin can be accessed from:

<https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/bulletin/2020/mar/regional-variation-in-economic-conditions.html#:~:text=Regions%20with%20a%20more%20diverse,did%20not%20experience%20the%20shock>.

(b) changes in land use potential and demand in established or traditional mining areas, particularly those generated by the decarbonised economy, renewable technology, manufacturing, defence, skills, and training

Significant potential exists for the beneficial use of lands beyond the traditional narrow suite of land uses, as described above. Given the existence of established buffers and good transport connectivity, land also lends itself to additional land uses including intensive agriculture and agricultural value-adding.

Council notes and acknowledges the groundbreaking work being undertaken by Muswellbrook and Singleton Shire Councils as part of the closure of the Mount Arthur North Open Cut Coal Mine (BHP Billiton).

Keenan and Holcombe (2021) in their research paper *Mining as a temporary land use: A global stocktake of post-mining transitions and repurposing*, as published in the journal *The Extractive Industries and Society* (vol. 8, issue 3, September 2021) notes that there has been a convergence between the establishment of mine closure regulations from the 1970s to the 1990s in many jurisdictions globally and the development of major industrial scale mines that will subsequently need to follow these closure requirements. They highlight that by applying innovative approaches to such large-scale closures offers opportunity for industry to leave positive legacies. Keenan and Holcombe introduce the concept of "repurposing", as used in their paper extensively, noting that the concept is a relatively recent addition to this mining lexicon. The paper further recognises that large-scale mining rarely changes the geography of the mine-impacted areas in ways that make these

places more attractive to alternative forms of economic development in the future (Keenan and Holcombe 2021; Mitchell and O'Neill 2016). Further, this is notably the case in mining regions where there are cumulative industrial scale impacts over vast areas (Keenan and Holcombe 2021; Kretschmann 2020; Kirsch 2014). Additional intervention and support is therefore needed.

The topicality of this issue is evident with several recent initiatives including the International Council on Mining and Metal's (ICMM's) recent revision of the *Integrated Mine Closure: Good Practice Guide*, which now incorporates a "screening tool" for repurposing activities and advocates incorporating sustainable development considerations (e.g. environment, economic, and social impacts) into mine closure planning from the outset of mine development (ICMM 2019). Likewise, Keenan and Holcombe note in their research that the 2019 mine closure conference held in Perth, Western Australia, included a specific workshop session for the first time on Repurposing, entitled "Reimagine. Repurpose. Relinquish." They further note that in Western Australia, a *Framework for Developing Mine Site Completion Criteria* has been developed.

The paper also highlights that corporate attention to the topic is also beginning to be reflected in the structure of mining companies and corporate policies. The acknowledge that one major global mining company has renamed their operations that have ceased production as "assets" rather than "legacies". Presumably this is to encourage a similarly entrepreneurial approach to their management, as for operational assets. Another major company has reframed community engagement planning and programming related to closure as "social transition". Keenan and Holcombe view these changes as the mining industry taking on increasing responsibility for the social impacts of mine closure, reflecting societal and, in some jurisdictions, regulatory expectations.

The Committee's attention is also drawn to the work of Keenan and Holcombe in their development of a global database of repurposing cases building on the Standard and Poors (S&P) Global Market Intelligence database, relevant literature and other publicly available information. Their article provides an overview of the findings and the themes which emerged from this global repurposing database of 141 cases. The associated research findings include: general observations on the research process; an analysis of the most common repurposing land uses; factors influencing repurposing, including factors internal and external to the company; initial observations about industry approaches to repurposing. In conclusion, Keenan and Holcombe found that reconceptualising mine 'closure' and the associated mining legacies is an essential operational shift that the extractives industry, notably the major companies, will need to make in order to keep pace with societal and local community expectation.

(c) opportunities for investment and growth in training and skills in established or traditional mining areas, including:

The current proportion of FIFO / DIDO workers suggests Narrabri's current lifestyle offering is insufficiently attractive to entice people to the region. Narrabri also has a significant Aboriginal population who experience lower socio-economic outcomes than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Narrabri has experienced substantial growth in recent years, with growth concentrated in mining. The number of jobs and incomes have grown moderately as well. The number of

employing businesses in the region has declined, which suggest the absence of broader growth across industries, though there are some stand-out business successes in the region.

As detailed previously, mining is the dominant industry in Narrabri contributing over half of total output. Agriculture is the second largest industry by output and the largest by employment. Both industries face challenges in terms of their contribution to Narrabri's future prosperity. Mining is highly capital intensive (so does not create large numbers of jobs), highly concentrated across four mines (creating vulnerabilities) and is vulnerable to action on climate change in key export markets. Agriculture is a strength for the region, though employment in agriculture is declining due to technological improvements and farm consolidation.

Narrabri's most important endowments are coal and natural gas deposits, low-cost productive agricultural land, and passenger transport connections (Newell and Kamilaroi highways, rail connection to Werris Creek and Moree and Narrabri Airport). Of these endowments, coal and natural gas deposits are unique comparative advantages within the New England and North West Region. Compared to the region, Narrabri's industry is constrained by limited water resources. The Narrabri Gas Project (NGP) has the potential to supply the region with industrial volumes of gas which would create a significant new comparative advantage that could drive economic development in Narrabri.

On its own, the construction and operations of the Narrabri Gas Project would allow some people in the coal industry with transferable skills to transition to the gas industry.

There is a pipeline of approved and proposed projects in Narrabri which represent significant investment in the region from government and private sector investors. The investments span new infrastructure projects such as the Inland Rail and Inland Port, private sector investments to extend mining in the region and a growing solar farm industry.

(i) the need to reskill and or retrain current workforces

There is a strong need to both retrain and reskill workers to ensure that they are not lost to the regions. It is acknowledged that the *New England North West Local Jobs Plan* sets out the training and employment challenges and priorities of the region, and associated strategies that will drive the design and implementation of projects to address these challenges. Under the Plan, a focus on renewable energy skills is identified under Priority 5 – Net Zero Transition.

<https://www.dewr.gov.au/local-jobs/resources/new-england-and-north-west-local-jobs-plan>

A future amendment to capture skills requirements and needs for transitional mining economies is recommended.

It is understood that TAFE NSW has played a limited role in delivery of training within mining communities. This has represented a lost opportunity and training has been progressively procured from other registered training organisations (RTOs) as an alternative. A review of the current gaps and shortfalls with the delivery of training/skills development within TAFE NSW is therefore recommended. The importance of retention of the TAFE institution within rural and regional communities is well documented. The

Committee's attention is also drawn to the Country Universities Centre (CUC) model which is actively supported by Narrabri Shire Council. Further information is available from:

<https://www.cuc.edu.au/>

The CUC would have a pivotal role in future retraining and upskilling opportunities.

The Committee's attention is drawn to the *Narrabri Economic Development Strategy* and the *Narrabri Shire Regional Workforce and Skills Strategy*, which can be accessed from:

<https://www.narrabri.nsw.gov.au/Our-Community/Business-and-Economic-Development/Economic-Development-Strategy-and-Regional-Workforce-Skills-Strategy#:~:text=The%20core%20objectives%20focus%20on,funded%20by%20the%20NSW%20Government.>

Council's Economic Development Strategy outlines the need for greater collaboration between existing mining industries, local education providers and all levels of Government to reduce vulnerabilities and risk for local workforce, caused by downturns in viable economic conditions, and coal prices, and a transitioning decarbonised economy. Of a local mining workforce of 1,501 people, 58.4%, or 877 people identify as having an occupation of Machinery drivers and operators. Technicians and Trades represent 23.9% of overall workforce (358 people). A great opportunity exists now to upskill and retrain these employees and occupations for future in-demand jobs and industries, post mining. In the context of Narrabri Shire, this could include employment in education, health, agriculture, manufacturing industries.

Mine sites have a substantial footprint in their own right but are usually in the centre of far greater holding of land, some of which can be used for spoil, future expansion or a buffer zone to neighbours.

It is not uncommon that land not directly being used for mining can be used for its original purpose being agricultural purposes based around cattle, sheep, hay or general purposes. Therefore, there could be an opportunity to transition some members of an existing resource workforce into getting experience in an agricultural environment. Not only could this be practical hands-on experience but there could be opportunities to upskill workers for a different career as mentioned above at the local Country Universities Centre or a more specific agricultural college.

(ii) the impact and effectiveness of existing and new education, training, and skills providers for mining communities

Refer to preceding commentary regarding the need for strategic alignment with the Local Jobs Plan. Priority areas will need to be adequately supported by appropriate funding, industry cooperation and support.

(d) opportunities to encourage innovative post-mining land uses including:

(i) the planning and implementation of essential supporting infrastructure for future site use

Council recommends the completion of regional audits in respect of available and proposed infrastructure to establish capability parameters and associated impediments to potential future development.

Narrabri Shire is strategically located with reasonably efficient and highly important access to key domestic markets and international gateways. Future necessary investments will further strengthen this. Narrabri Shire is located directly along or in close proximity to key inland transport routes connecting to Brisbane, Melbourne, Newcastle and Sydney. This gives the Shire an advantage in attracting and retaining businesses that rely on efficient access to domestic and international markets via road and rail. The Shire's geographic advantages will be harnessed by planned investments, including Inland Rail, the former SAP area and N2IP (Inland Port), which will enhance and leverage connectivity to Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle and Melbourne to support new and existing industries.

Narrabri Shire Council supports the construction of the nation building Inland Rail infrastructure. Council continuous to work with the Inland Rail organisation to assist in fast tracking the Narramine to Narrabri (N2N) stage of the development. Producers and potential future developers need assurance that this project will be completed quickly, to confidently invest in on-farm storage and plan for expanded intermodal operations over the next decade.

These investments will provide opportunities for local industries across Narrabri Shire's townships, supporting greater market access for producers and businesses. For Narrabri Shire to harness its competitive geographic advantage and connectivity for the benefit of the community and industry, ongoing infrastructure investment will be a key priority. This includes new connections, such as Inland Rail, as well as upgrading and maintaining existing connections, including flood-proofing key roads and enhancing access for road and rail freight.

(ii) the development of solar farms, pumped hydro, and other clean energy industries

Council is supportive of the beneficial use of post-mining lands to a range of clean energy industries and projects. It should be noted, however, that such projects are typically low employment generators. Accordingly, establishment of a diverse range of industries (including industrial and commercial activities) is preferred.

Of particular interest is the current limitations to the current electricity transmission and distribution network.

In this vein, the findings of the *NSW Electricity Supply and Reliability Check Up* (August 2023), as prepared for NSW Treasury Office of Energy and Climate Change by consultants Marsden Jacob, notes that The Roadmap's current approach of supporting large generation projects, long-duration storage projects such as pumped hydro, and major new transmission projects is subject to significant engineering and cost risks.

On this basis, Council takes the opportunity to draw the Committee's attention to the ongoing uncertainty and delays surrounding the delivery of the Narrabri Gas Project and requests urgent intervention to facilitate project delivery. In this regard, the recently adopted *Australia Future Gas Strategy* establishes the role gas will play in the transition to

net zero by 2050, with the aim of securing affordable gas for Australia towards a more renewable grid, and confirmation of a national policy commitment to being a reliable trading partner. It is noted that the Strategy is underpinned by the following principles:

- Australia is committed to supporting global emissions reductions to reduce the impacts of climate change and will reach net zero emissions by 2050.
- Gas must remain affordable for Australian users throughout the transition to net zero.
- New sources of gas supply are needed to meet demand during the economy-wide transition.
- Reliable gas supply will gradually and inevitably support a shift towards higher-value and non-substitutable gas uses. Households will continue to have a choice over how their energy needs are met.
- Gas and electricity markets must adapt to remain fit for purpose throughout the energy transformation.
- Australia is, and will remain, a reliable trading partner for energy, including LNG and low emission gases.

It should be further noted that a number of mining operations are now incorporating renewable energy projects. The Committee's attention is drawn to the following:

Whitehaven Coal Solar Farm Project:

<https://whitehavencoal.com.au/whitehaven-solar-farm-project/>, and

<https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/whitehaven-solar-farm>

(iii) the compatibility of post mining land sites with commercial projects

Significant opportunities exist for establishment of commercial land uses post-mining. One of the primary inhibitors is the current NSW planning framework which limits innovation in this space. Consideration should be given to the establishment of Post-Mining Employment Precincts (similar in nature and operation to Special Activation Precincts) within relevant local environmental plans (LEPs).

The Employment Precincts could facilitate:

- Fast-tracking of new industry and associated incentivisation of higher employment generating land uses;
- Potential connectivity to the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) International Framework for Eco-Industrial Parks; and
- Provision of a concierge service for proposed developments in these designated areas with potential involvement by the Regional Growth NSW Development Corporation (RGDC).

There are a number of heavy industries that would be in keeping with the zonings allocated to operational mines (generally RU1 Primary Production). Opportunities would exist to relocate heavy industry from an area that is being encroached by residential or light commercial/industrial businesses. A successfully functioning mine site requires access to the following:

- Rail siding/loop.
- Energy (electricity).

- Water.
- Telecommunications.

This existing infrastructure would act as an attracting agent for heavy industry looking to relocate to a more suitable location. A number of mines are looking to establish their own large scale solar operations that are dedicated to their facility. By the time some of these mines close, a part of their legacy for the site and the community will be access to substantial renewable energy infrastructure.

The environmental conditions, footprint and associated buffers and infrastructure on existing mine site lands, could potentially lend itself to scientific research and development, including manufacturers testing facilities for, but not limited to agriculture, transportation and defence.

Early and detailed engagement is needed with coal mining companies to establish their appetite for ongoing investment in their sites and to obtain a more detailed understanding of their strategic business models. Under this proposed framework, there are great opportunities to provide support to these existing investors and assist them in their own business transition to maintain financial viability and remain engaged and committed to their host communities.

(iv) the potential of unlocking surrounding land for residential dwellings, amenities, environmental and educational facilities

Council is supportive of a strategic approach to planning in respect of post-mining land uses. The Committee's attention is drawn to the work undertaken by the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) and Narrabri Shire Council in respect of the Narrabri Place Strategy. The Narrabri Place Strategy is a holistic document that has been developed to attract new economic growth and investment that stimulates population growth, facilitating new housing opportunities. The draft strategy will be realised over a 20-year period, providing certainty for current and future communities. It will stimulate new opportunities for residential growth and business investment in high-skill, value add agriculture and manufacturing industries, driving long-term positive economic and social development outcomes for the Narrabri community.

The draft strategy applies to approximately 1,099ha of land identified across three precincts:

- Residential precinct, located south of the junction of the Newell and Kamilaroi Highways
- Employment Lands precinct located west of the Newell Highway.
- Northern NSW Inland Port precinct located along the southern side of the Walgett Railway Line and west of the Newell Highway.
- In addition, the town centre and Lakeside Village are also a focus of the draft strategy that will enable renewal and growth for Narrabri.

Planning for the draft strategy began in 2021 with the DPHI, Council, DRNSW and technical experts engaged to undertake economic, environmental, social and planning studies under the SAP program. These investigations were carried out across a wider precinct, up to 10km from Narrabri township, however they detail constraints and opportunities for the land to which the draft strategy applies. The document is currently pending public exhibition.

There is an opportunity for similar studies, or an amendment thereof, to incorporate post-mining productive land uses.

(e) how to ensure the benefit from innovative post mine land uses are shared between the community and mine operators

Limited benefit from existing coal mines has been directed to the local communities. Despite significant royalties being generated from mining activities, the corresponding financial benefits have largely bypassed the Narrabri community with all of the disadvantages from a mining affected community being experienced. This inequity needs to be urgently addressed, and transparent, apolitical systems established to ensure that benefits are appropriately shared within host communities.

It is noted that the *Mining Act 1992* establishes the Royalties for Rejuvenation Fund, which is a \$25 million commitment each year. The existing commitment represent a significant financial shortfall in facilitating effective transition to post-mining economies. Substantial additional investment is needed now to ensure communities are adequately prepared for the impending profound economic and social change.

In principle, Council is cautiously supportive of the establishment of the Future Jobs and Investment Authority. It is considered essential that such an Authority is:

1. Apolitical in nature and is bound by robust governance, accountability and reporting frameworks;
2. Is appropriately financed to effect meaningful change and to ensure efficacy of programs delivered within its remit;
3. Ensures local government has not only a seat at the table but a clear voice in future decision making on issues that directly affect their communities;
4. Incorporates systems and internal processes to ensure that funds are unwittingly fettered away in the pursuit of programs or initiatives that are predominantly academic in nature and untested/research-led i.e. delivered outcomes must have clear and tangible benefits;
5. Contains clear assurances that the Authority does not comprise an additional layer of bureaucracy and decision-making; and
6. Ensures that any future program delivered by the Authority ensures clear linkages and alignment with Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) frameworks, including its adopted Community Strategic Plan(s).

(f) the expectations of mining communities in relation to post-mine land use, and how to balance this with innovative reuse of existing infrastructure

Any strategic planning projects should be built upon a foundation of comprehensive community engagement. Given that each mine is supported by a Community Consultative Committee (CCC), a unique opportunity exists to build upon existing knowledge and shape future direction of communities.

There are also excellent opportunities to more effectively and meaningfully engage with Aboriginal communities as part of this process. In this regard the Committee's attention is drawn to the Australian Government publication *Engaging with Indigenous Australia*—

exploring the conditions for effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013).

There are a significant number of instances globally where mines that have come to the end of their primary use have been repurposed across a range of industries. A broad range of secondary uses include the following:

- Active tourism, inclusive of physical and adventure tourism.
- Recreation and hotel accommodation.
- Office accommodation.
- Processing waste and other materials in bio-reactors.
- Science precincts.
- Energy generation.
- Wetlands.
- Returning it to the same industry prior to mining (cattle, agriculture).

Although not all of the above suggestions could relate to any one mine, either due to geographic location or surrounding population, it is imperative to the ongoing health of the community that either the existing strengths of the region is harnessed post closure or a strong diversified business is attracted. This would endeavour to continue the diversity of industry within the community that would potentially be lost with the closing down of the resource industry within an area.

As the NSW State Government is a large beneficiary of the existing mining industry. In 2020 alone Whitehaven Coal paid approximately \$152 million in royalties to the State Government. It is therefore incumbent on the NSW State government to re-invest some of those tax gains into the areas that they will receive substantial tax revenue over the next generation. An example in Narrabri would be a dedicated commercial/industrial precinct that would be positioned to attract future business and industry from higher density environments to the more open spaces of a disused post mine location.

An operational mine has substantial energy infrastructure as a part of its ongoing operations. This would be seen as a real benefit to a business wanting to move to the post mine location that that type of infrastructure was already in place. Further, IT&T connectivity would be to an advanced level in addition to water accessibility and a rail connection. All of this activating infrastructure would be a direct benefit to a new development and a substantial cost and time saving to the potential post mine developer.

(g) the need to develop a robust independent regulatory framework to maintain and advance best practice in this area, and

As detailed in the preceding section, the current NSW planning framework presents impediments to innovation. Changes to the *Mining Act 1992* to facilitate transitional arrangements may also be required. As detailed previously, these changes will need to be adequately funded.

While the NSW Government's commitment to plan for the future is welcomed, the replacement of a bureaucratic structure with another, larger bureaucratic structure is of concern. Urgent funding must also be allocated to replace the scrapped 'Resources for Regions' program. The 'Resources for Regions' program delivered funding for NSW

mining communities but was scrapped by the NSW Government in a previous State Budget. This funding must be urgently restored.

It is noted that the NSW Government will also receive a multi-billion dollar boost to its forward revenues due to coal royalty increases announced last year.

(h) any other related matters

The following feedback has been provided to the Department of Regional NSW in respect of the Future Jobs and Investment Authorities Discussion Paper (May 2024) in response to the guiding questions:

1. *What other impacts should the NSW Government consider in preparing for a decline in coal demand?*

Potential impacts are difficult to predict without detailed market sounding and stakeholder engagement. With the pace of change in technology and changing consumer spending patterns many new industries and jobs will undoubtedly emerge during the Net Zero transition phase. On this basis, any framework needs to be sufficiently agile to take advantage and accommodate emerging opportunities and challenges.

2. *What are the most important things the NSW Government should be doing now to help your specific region?*

It is imperative that strategic planning and change management commences now. Although the North West region is not expected to fully transition from coal mining for some time, it is important that the region is prepared and adequate upfront investment is being made. In this regard, the NSW Government may consider the creation of a Future Fund that progressively sets aside a component of mining royalties with contributions increasing closer to expected transition benchmarks.

As detailed in a previous section, an audit of current infrastructure and opportunities for repurposing for future developments should be undertaken. An assessment of current development approvals and associated consent arrangements should also be completed to establish if there are any impediments to the transitional piece.

3. *What should be the key priorities for the NSW Government and the Future Jobs and Investment Authorities in supporting coal-reliant regions?*

The priorities should be established by impacted communities via a process underpinned by extensive community engagement utilising IAP2 principles.

4. *Are there other key outcomes or success measures that should be the focus for Future Jobs and Investment Authorities?*

Through the design of the new program, there should be a clear focus on transparency and mechanisms for the measurement of success and these should

clearly align to the identified engagement outcomes. Reporting in relation to KPIs or associated benchmarking should not be the responsibility of local government.

5. *What else could the NSW Government consider as part of the strategic work program to support the objectives of the Future Jobs and Investment Authorities?*

The strategic work program should consider the need for corresponding amendments and augmentation to the current suite of strategic planning documents including, but limited to:

- Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS) as relevant including the Upper North West REDS 2023;
- Regional Plans; including the New England North West Regional Plan 2041;
- Local Strategic Planning Statements (LSPS) and Growth Management Strategies (GMS); and
- Local Economic Development Strategies.

A collaborative approach with local government should be pursued in the updating and delivery of any new strategic plans.

For each region it is recommended that a **Mining Transition Plan** be prepared to guide future investment. This ideally would be built upon detailed community engagement. It is imperative that impacted local government areas are effectively consulted with through this process.

6. *Do the proposed principles to govern the Future Jobs and Investment Authorities align with your region's vision for how the Future Jobs and Investment Authorities should work?*

As detailed community engagement has not been undertaken with affected communities it is considered premature to answer this question.

7. *How should the NSW Government ensure that relevant stakeholders, including workers, industry and local communities provide input into how the government supports the future for coal-reliant regions?*

A detailed community engagement plan should be developed at inception of the process to guide stakeholder engagement. As detailed previously, this consultation framework should be established using IAP2 principles.

8. *How can the NSW Government best use the proposed local authorities to ensure local views are represented?*

Strong relationships will need to be forged with key stakeholders, including local government. The community engagement plan should detail corresponding mechanisms to ensure that stakeholder views are adequately captured and represented.

9. *How should the timeline of planned mine consent expiry and indicated power station closure dates across each region inform the allocation of the Government's resources to support the Authorities?*

An appropriate methodology on proposed support arrangements and funding allocations should be established in consultation with mining-affected communities. Council is of the view that the funds and associated support efforts should be distributed in an equitable fashion. The transitional support arrangements should not be used to 'prop up' the achievement of existing policy objectives such as the Net Zero Policy at the expense of other communities.

10. *What skills or expertise should members of the Local Authority have to effectively inform decisions on priorities for each region?*

The future Authority would benefit from a broad range of professional experience and expertise, including, but not limited to economic development, mining operations, circular economies, Aboriginal and First Nations representation and engagement. Representation should be flexible and based on each Region's unique circumstances, demography and specific endowments.

11. *Is there anything else that should be included in the proposed operating model for the Future Jobs and Investment Authorities?*

As detailed in the corresponding discussion paper, effective collaboration is key. The recruitment process should ensure that appointed staff have a proven track record in building partnerships and are able to work with a range of diverse stakeholders in a rural and regional context.

12. *What types of investments should the NSW Government prioritise for funding?*

A clear strategic road map and alignment of relevant strategic plans should be undertaken along with the consolidation of key datasets to inform future decision making. As detailed previously, a detailed audit of existing infrastructure against project commitments and conditions of development consent should be undertaken to establish a baseline.

A large amount of information is currently held in Social Impact Management Plans (SIMPs) for each coal mine. Many of the commitments have failed to be met by the proponent coal mines and as a consequence a gap analysis and audit of shortfalls should be undertaken on a regional basis.

An assessment of community priorities contained within each impacted Council's IP&R framework should also be undertaken. Wherever practicable, investment should align to established community priorities. It would be highly beneficial for Councils to share in a component of any distributed funds as untied grants to assist in the delivery of current community projects as identified in its IP&R suite of documents.

Investment in transitioning of RTOs to provide certainty and enable early establishment of programs would be beneficial. This can in turn be overlaid with any market intelligence surrounding major project pipelines and delivery timeframes.

Following the 2023 NSW local government elections, Council was advised that the Narrabri SAP would no longer be proceeding and funding was subsequently withdrawn. Council has been actively advocating for reinstatement of the funding from both State and Federal government to enable essential enabling infrastructure including construction of a rail siding at Council's N2IP (Inland Port) site to proceed as soon as is practicable.

13. *Are there other tangible outcomes that the Future Jobs and Investment Board should focus on to help deliver and measure benefits over time?*

The establishment of associated reporting frameworks to accurately report on local benefits and return on investment (ROI) should be an early focus. With the Narrabri to North Star (N2NS) section of the Inland Project for example, the applied reporting systems lacked the required granularity to appropriately interrogate and report on local spend and workforce participation down to a local government area (LGA) level. This is also relevant to First Nations participation and associated project involvement by Aboriginal/First Nations businesses.

14. *Are there any other key elements that should be included in the Future Jobs and Investment Board's annual reporting?*

Reporting should clearly detail associated administrative costs, achievement of organisational objectives and their strategic alignment. It is recommended that Auditing be overseen by the Audit Office of NSW.

15. *Are there other accountability or transparency measures the NSW Government should adopt to ensure the Future Jobs and Investment Authorities deliver on the objectives?*

As detailed above annual financial auditing should be undertaken by the Audit Office of NSW. Clear mechanisms and frameworks need to be established to address probity considerations and management of conflicts of interest.

16. *Do you have any further suggestions for how the NSW Government can support coal-reliant communities?*

As detailed previously, allocation of appropriate funding is necessary to affect meaningful change and to assist communities in achieving their objectives. The previously allocated \$25m under Royalties for Rejuvenation is considered vastly inadequate for this purpose.

Should you require any additional information or clarification in this regard you are invited to contact Council's Director Planning and Sustainability, Ms Donna Ausling at

Yours faithfully,

Rob Williams
General Manager