Submission No 64

INQUIRY INTO BENEFICIAL AND PRODUCTIVE POST-MINING LAND USE

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Post Mining Land Use Inquiry

I submit that Post Mining Land Use (PMLU) considerations must include, to the greatest extent possible, ecosystem reparation and landscape scale ecological integrity restoration to accommodate predicted impacts of climate change, particularly on biodiversity. Landscape scale rehabilitation and revegetation would, of course, also mitigate the impacts of extreme events of wild weather on humans and infrastructure.

The last two decades of open cut coalmining in the Hunter Valley have been particularly devastating for biodiversity. The exploitation of the natural resources over the previous two hundred years of colonisation had already left the legacy of fragmented remnants of the valley floor vegetation, mostly all threatened ecological communities, and manythreatened flora and fauna species from critical loss of their habitat both in the valley and the broader state.

I commend and direct the Inquiry to the report *Barrington to Hawkesbury Climate Corridors – connecting regional climate change refugia for native species persistence in a warming world* produced and published by the Hunter Community Environment Centre. This report provides an objective data based methodology to inform landuse decisionmaking that recognises the need to incorporate biodiversity considerations in planning if we really want to limit species extinction. This work should be repeated for all of the Hunter Valley.

Last year's summer was the warmest in 2000 years

The Standing Committee on State Development Inquiry into Post Mining Land Use (PMLU) has Terms of Reference (ToR) that frame the inquiry in the twentieth century. The ToR, to be truly providing for a beneficial and productive inquiry report need to recognise the environmental reality of 2024.

It is imperative that the inquiry considers the context of the climate emergency that our rapidly heating planet is embroiled in and acknowledges the consequences of mining as a past land use.

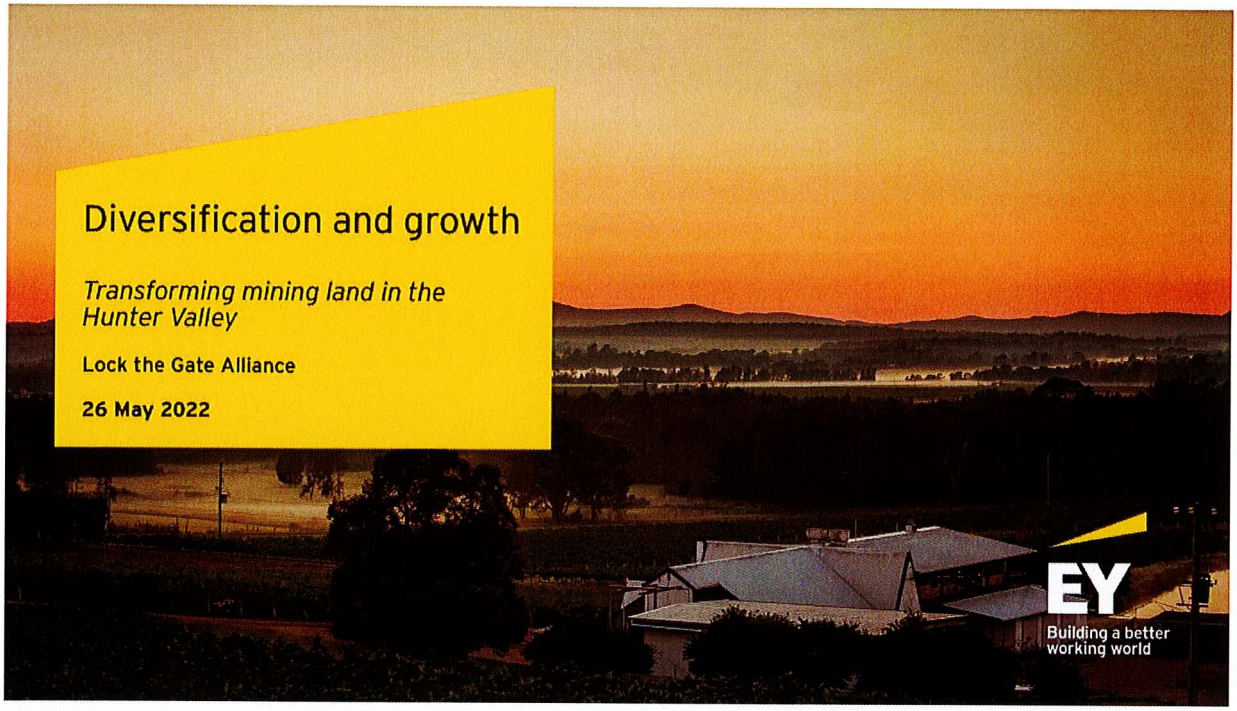
ToR (a) directs the inquiry to... the positive benefits for local communities and the economy, business, industry, and the broader state.

PMLU considerations need to be based on planning at a regional scale that is based on recognition of an increasingly unstable climate. They need to primarily recognise the existing environmental constraints and opportunities and demand actual implementation of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) principles. There was never any respect for intergenerational equity, nor the accurate valuation and internalisation of costs, let alone the vitally important conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity. This failure to integrate ecology with economy has at last been recognised.

Positive benefits for local communities and the broader state, including future generations, will only be possible if nature reparation and restoration perspective is actually incorporated in to planning. This requires catchment scale ecosystem restoration. PMLU consideration is not a issue of jobs versus the environment, on the contrary!

The report by Ernst Young commissioned by Lock the Gate Alliance is an excellent example of the necessary approach if there is any hope of sustained positive benefits for local communities.

https://www.hunterrenewal.org.au/transforming_mining_land_in_the_hunter_valley



The establishment of a realistically funded regional Authority in the Hunter that empowers the community in the reparation and rejuvenation of their environment, that engages experts and educators, scientists and artists with innovation and initiative will give the over-exploited and much abused Hunter Valley new heart.

I recommend the Inquiry listens to Big Ideas RN broadcast last week from Muswellbrook - *Hope at the coalface — can this coal town thrive in a post-Carbon future?* There is wide community support for the work done by Hunter Renewal. This should be built upon. Community Blueprint to Restore the Hunter

To get credibility and respect a Regional Authority needs to be able to be immediately responsive to the community, including facilitating public access to the existing regulatory government agencies such as EPA for air quality monitoring. The interaction of a Regional Authority with Local Land Services, Department Planning Industry and Environment, Department of Climate Change Energy, the Environment and Water, Local Government needs serious thinking. Will DPIE 'look after' the Hunter River when the Water Sharing Plan no longer includes both extraction and release of high salinity water by mines? A Regional Authority is best placed to take responsibility for the lifeblood of the region.

The Regional Authority needs to be using and integrating best available information and technology for decision-making with active links for local knowledge to enable incorporation of the many perspectives that must be brought to bear. For example ,simply from the criteria of grassed flat land, a mining company may think it an appropriate location for a solar farm. If the existing land use of production of native grass seed, at a commercial scale was not recognised this ostensibly 'good' land use would be 'bad' as there is a very limited supply. Read article on seed supply here

The development and investment opportunities in PMLU is the chance to rebuild the public service for the greater good in the public interest and initiate community based publically owned enterprises and support networks.

The government could encourage, incentivise, demand or impose on mining companies the recognition of their responsibility for the current state of the Hunter Valley environment and the need for rehabilitation, beyond what is currently required by their legal obligations.

I support the call that the Hunter Valley needs an integrated landscape restoration plan, and a dedicated public authority to implement it. The development of the land restoration industry with collaboration of mining companies amongst themselves, sharing the restoration work knowledge gained by learning from both failure and success and the cooperation with a Regional Authority and educational and training institutions developed to support the industry is not a wild dream. It makes sense. It is needed.

Marg Mclean

Ecologically Sustainable Development