

I live in a mining-affected community, Bulga 2330.

Such communities have been angered and dismayed for years by the regulatory capture of the Department of Planning by the mining industry.

The continuation of approvals for mining, particularly open-cut, without regard for health, social impact, environmental damage, loss of heritage both Aboriginal and European, destruction of ecologically significant flora and fauna and overall despoilment of Australia's rural landscape must not be allowed to continue.

The Department of Planning has formed strong alliances with the industry becoming apologists for their lack of willingness to comply with "Approval Conditions" supposedly set and sanctioned by the same.

There is a total refusal to apply such principles as "precautionary principle" or effective rehabilitation of the land (i.e. returning it to a "prior use" state). This cosy relationship must be replaced by a truly independent body of properly qualified experts.

Whilst the current situation is dire for communities this Policy threatens to worsen the situation by narrowing the scope of EIS and reducing the need for the industry to comply with more rigorous requirements to protect affected communities.

The standard assessment guidelines are notably deficient in social impact guidelines and completely lack responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions.

The standard assessment requirements do not match the statutory benchmarks in s79C of the EP and A Act and Part 3 of the Mining SEPP.

The entire Policy is littered with inadequacies but I request that the following be carefully considered and included in future drafts.

1. Whilst the removal of 12AA from the Mining SEPP is a welcome first step, it is **vital** that **12AB** also be removed. This iniquitous clause provides for non-discretionary standards and allows that an inability to comply with such is not a reason for a PAC to disapprove a project! Arrant nonsense! Standards should be non-discretionary and the proponent **must** abide by such standards no "ifs", "buts" or exceptions!
2. Third Party merit Appeal rights **must** be restored. Citizens must be given a level playing field.
3. Get rid of the inequitable Land Acquisition Policy which prevents justice for people left with "stranded assets" when mining impact makes it impossible for those affected to sell their homes and move, even if the impacts are so great that they need to sell and get away from those impacts.
4. Remove the Major Projects Offset Policy. Why should it be possible for mining to impact on the survival of vanishing bush and wildlife simply because the project is deemed (often incorrectly) "Significant"?
5. There **must** be triple bottom line assessment of new exploration leases. This was recommended by ICAC. **No** more exploration licences until the adoption of new guidelines is complete.
6. **MUCH** more rigorous guidelines for economic assessments and social impacts as a **mandatory** requirement for all mine assessments.
Allowing some costs such as health, State-built infrastructure and responsibility for restoration of final voids to be deemed "externalities" and, as such, not included in economic assessments is nonsensical. These are real costs ultimately borne by the State government (i.e. taxpayers) and come from the same coffers that receive any economic "benefits".
7. There should be a cumulative impact assessment on the impact of coal mining on water resources, particularly in the Hunter Valley.

Courtesy of the Planning Department mines are allowed to leave huge final voids at depths below that of sea-level. The likelihood that these voids will cause loss of water from aquifers is real. There must be a new and unwavering policy on final voids as a matter of urgency. There should be no approvals of new mines or expansions until this is complete.

8. There should be an equitable water sharing plan to reduce the huge volumes of water removed from aquifers by mining for activities such as washing coal. Water is precious in Australia its' primary use and allocation should be for human and wildlife needs and for irrigation.
9. Firmly protect and prevent any further clearing of critically endangered woodlands and habitat for vanishing wildlife through the Upper Hunter Strategic Assessment
10. Impose load-based licencing limits on air and water pollution by mines. Much more rigorous limits on noise impacts and air pollution.

It is time for mining activities to be legislated and assessed with proper and adequate account of risks and benefits examined in an unbiased way by experts who are peer-reviewed and owe no allegiance to the mining industry or to the Department of Planning. The input of communities should be given equal weight as that given to the proponent and DoPE.

Such assessment should be carried out transparently in an open forum (as happens in The Land and Environment Court)

DoPE by too close association and accommodation of the mining industry has rightly earned the distrust of mining-affected communities and the public at large.

This Integrated Mining Policy should be cognisant of that and willing to redress the imbalance that has existed.

We now appear to have a Planning Minister with an open mind and more vision. This Policy should support that.

Julie