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Online Submission

Jan 31

To:

Submission on Draft Hunter Regional Plan

â€¢ The intent of the Draft Plan is not properly conveyed to a reader and there is no defined outcome that indicates any intent other than to progress the stateâ€™s ongoing rush to remove coal to reap royalties.

â€¢ The actual intent of the Draft Plan may be simply an exercise within the Planning Department whereby it will be used to validate whatever direction the Department takes in the future within the Hunter Region. This can later be looked back on as being consultation for whatever form of extraction the Department wants support for and in doing so the support will show little disagreement or agreement with what is being further processed.

This approach was used in removing water from the land when initiating the water sharing act of 2000, with a similar retrospect format with the coal acquisition in 1982.

Both actions were not adequately consulted and were processed in such a way the landowners were misled.

â€¢ This document would be easier to read if the colouring on the maps had more contrast

For example, the map on pages 46-47 has 4 different shades of green! It is impossible for colour-blind people to distinguish.

The Hunter Valley was a highly productive agricultural area in the past. All agricultural pursuits could be found throughout the valley prior to the coal boom. Since the expansion of coal mining in the last forty years, this has been significantly reduced. Farmers have been encouraged or forced off their land so that coal mining could take over. The priority for coal has been the intent of the NSW Government since the Acquisition by the government of all coal. It is time the NSW Government realised that alternate forms of energy need to be used and to assist in the development of this technology. That would benefit the whole of society, not just particular interest groups.

Throughout the whole document there is only one reference to agricultural activities other than viticulture, equine industry and oyster aquaculture. Planning and Environment are being short-sighted in giving mining priority over food production, protecting only viticulture, equine and oyster industries. Australia is a net exporter of food. In the future we will not be able to feed our own population.

Reference is made to geothermal energy on page 19. At present, geothermal energy has been abandoned in the Hunter, with Geodynamics filling in their remaining bore holes in the Upper Hunter in mid-2015.

In reference to the transport system, passenger rail transport to the Upper Hunter has declined over the last decades, more recently with the closure of the rail line into Newcastle CBD. The benefits of the new transport plan will be in the Hunter City area, not in the more distant regions.

The â€œanti-tourismâ€ aspect of the Singleton, Jerryâ€™s Plains, Muswellbrook areas need to be addressed. The enormous ugly open-cut mines with their visual impacts and source of air and noise pollution detract from the potential to attract visitors.

In the support small business action, again there is no mention of any support for agricultural industries producing food. One can only assume that with all the proposed expansion of industrial lands and areas for infrastructure there will be further losses of food-producing agricultural land.

Managing competing and conflicting interests has not been done fairly in the past. The NSW Government, through the Planning and Environment Department has taken the interests of the multi-national mining companies over that of the much smaller, less influential rural landholders. Why should the whole of the Western Hunter be set aside as a huge coal mine of the future? This is completely unconscionable on a number of levels.

• Alternate forms of energy need to be found now, not some time in the future when it is too late.

• Land in the area should be preserved for food production.

• The intent of rehabilitation must be to develop land that can return to primary production as was evident before the rush to extract coal.

So much of the region's arable land has been lost to mining in the last four decades. For example all the farms in the Warkworth area have vanished. There were dairy farms, orchards, beef cattle production, vegetable growing, and this is only one small area. The same thing has happened in Bulga, Jerry's Plains, Mount Thorley, Ravensworth and Camberwell, to mention just a few. Once farming land is lost to other pursuits it is difficult for it to ever return to viable farming.

The assessment of mining activities and management of them has failed so far. This is evident in the recent approval of the Warkworth Mount Thorley expansion. This was twice rejected in the Land and Environment Court and the Supreme Court, yet it has been approved by the NSW Government.

The review of the Industrial Noise Policy was a weakening of what was the current policy to allow mines to make more noise and get away with it. Standards need to be improved, not weakened.

Management of offset areas has failed. How can a mine's offsets be part of the mine area? The rules are absurd and defy common sense and logic. The NSW Government does not follow through with its own decisions, for example the Warkworth sands were NEVER to be mined. Somehow all this has now changed with the approval of the Warkworth Mount Thorley expansion.

We eagerly await the cumulative impact assessments for health and water, and hope that there will be some positive outcomes for the long suffering people of the Hunter and the environment.

There is nothing in the draft report to stop the destruction of smaller communities. Over the last decades small villages have vanished from the Singleton Area. Warkworth and Ravensworth have gone, Camberwell is much diminished and Bulga is threatened. Perhaps this is the unwritten plan.

The Draft document has been loosely put to meet what appears acceptable to the select groups that have been invited to assist development of the area in the future and it is obvious that these lobby groups are close to the government.

What has become acceptable industry through this lobbying does not meet the needs for the future.

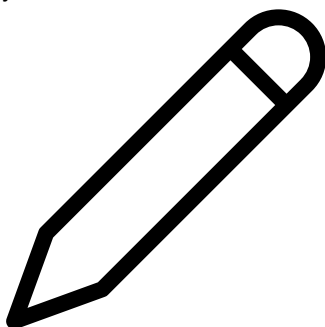
Viticulture was traditionally an industry that existed on the fringes of agricultural land, using areas that were not sustainable for food production. It is now part of a promoted culture change that seems to aim at the city based elites for excursion to the country and wine tastings.

Equine industry, including particularly the breeding of racing stock is only a pursuit of the highly financed groups and in particular to support the gambling industry which NSW relies on.

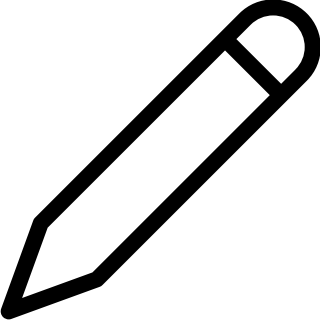
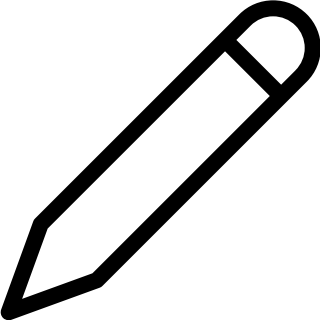
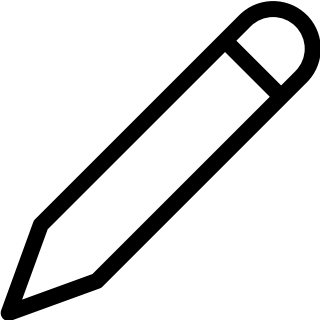
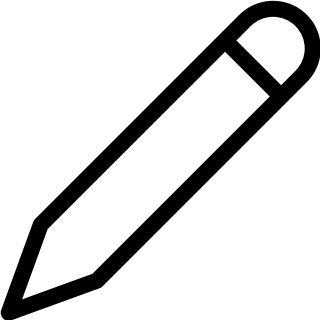
The oyster industry has little if any connection to the region determined as being above what is referred to as the Hunter City and shows little contact with reality.

To have developed a plan for the Hunter Region it would have been more appropriate to have researched what the region is truly capable of. What we are led to believe is the Government sees no future for the Hunter other than extracting all the coal that can be removed, all coal seam gas and whatever other resources can be extracted. It would have been more appropriate to look at the resources the valley has provided and can provide and work towards achieving a better future than that which appears to be the forecast.

Planning needs to realise that people live in the Hunter Region with intent to provide a better future for the area at large and within the scope of intent there is ongoing production of a selection of food resources for not only the local area but for the markets at large and unless we stop destroying the land in the pursuit of the royalties for the state and the significantly higher profits for the multinational companies, there will be no future for the supply from the valley nor for those who may reside in later times.



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