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Online Submission

Jan 31

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Submission on Draft Hunter Regional Plan

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. Since the expansion of coal mining in the last forty years, this has been significantly reduced. Farmers have left their land so that coal mining could take over. 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 "anti-tourism" aspect of the Singleton, Jerry'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.

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

â€¢ Land in the area should be preserved for food production.

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.

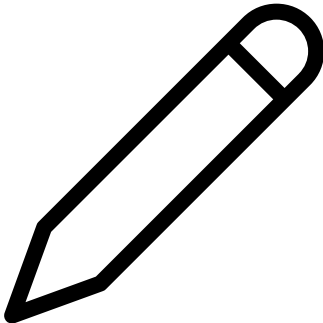
The review of the Industrial Noise Policy was a weakening of what was the current policy to allow mines to make more noise and get away with it. Standards need to be improved, not weakened.

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.

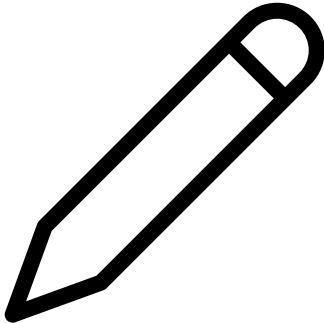
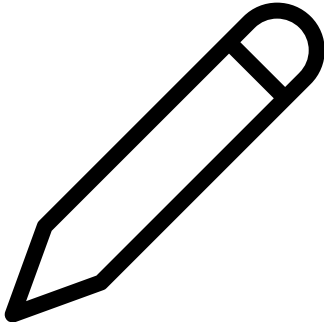
We eagerly await the cumulative impact assessments for health and water, and hope that there will be some positive outcomes for the long suffering people of the Hunter and the environment.

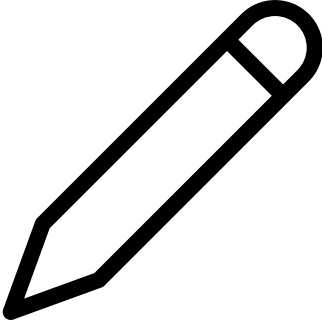
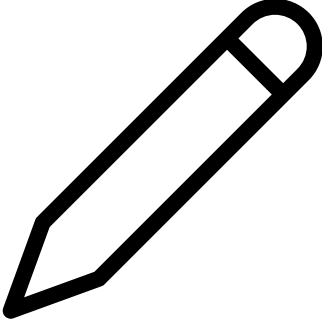
There is nothing in the draft report to stop the destruction of smaller communities. Over the last decades small villages have vanished from the Singleton Area. Warkworth and Ravensworth have gone, Camberwell is much diminished and Bulga is threatened. Perhaps this is the unwritten plan.

Do we all really want to drink wine and eat oysters at the races? Probably not! The needs and desires of all people in the Hunter need to be considered.



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