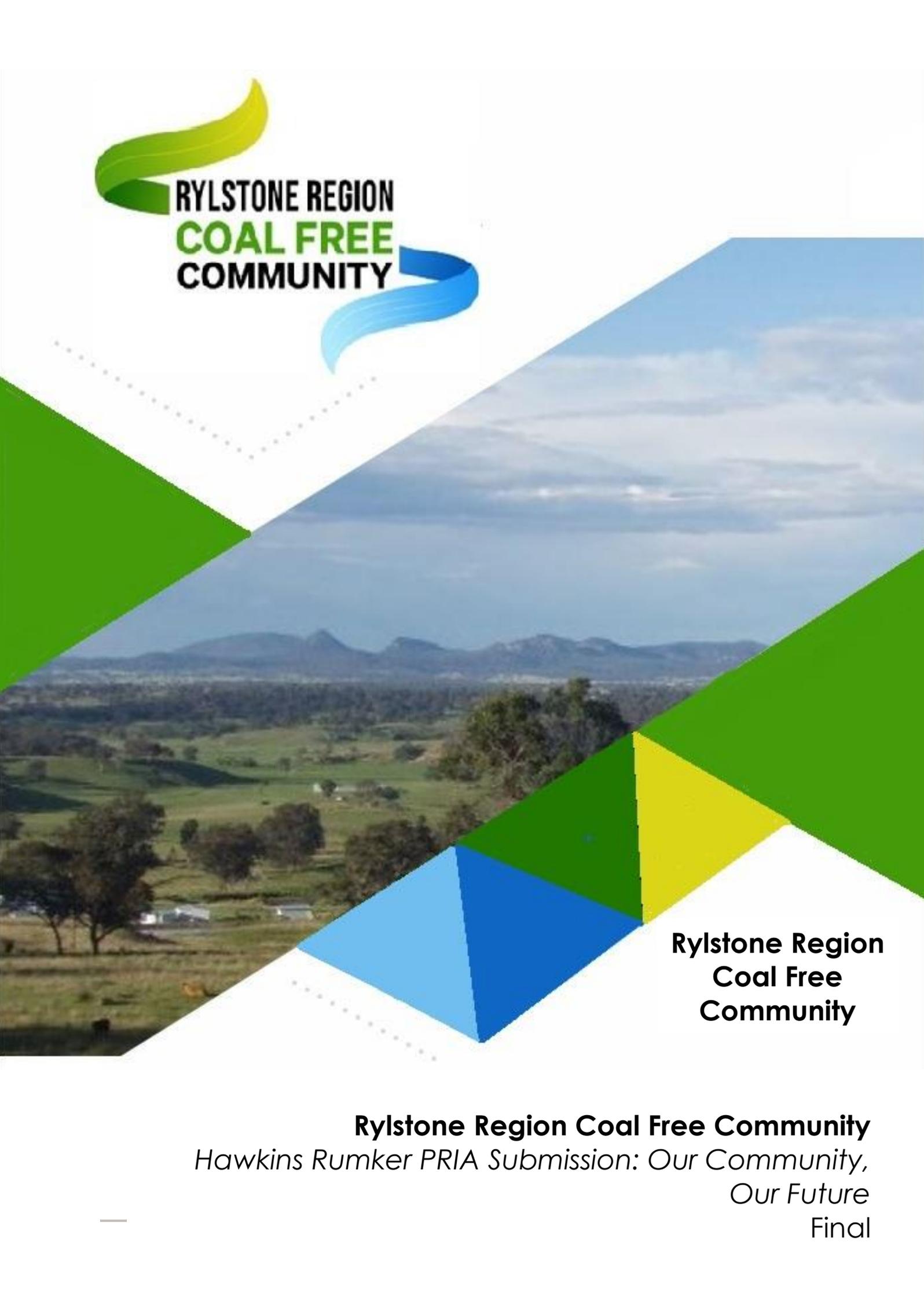




**RYLSTONE REGION
COAL FREE
COMMUNITY**



**Rylstone Region
Coal Free
Community**

Rylstone Region Coal Free Community
*Hawkins Rumker PRIA Submission: Our Community,
Our Future*
Final



Rylstone Region Coal Free Community

Hawkins Rumker PRIA Submission: Our Community, Our Future Draft

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August 2021

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Document Control

Document Reference	RRCFC submission our community our future FINAL.docx
Project	Rylstone Region Coal Free Community PRIA response
Document Type	Hawkins Rumker PRIA Submission: Our Community, Our Future
Author	Rylstone Region Coal Free Community

Acknowledgement of Country

The RRCFC acknowledges that we live and work on Wiradjuri Country.

We acknowledge the Wiradjuri peoples as the traditional custodians of the land, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.



Executive Summary

2020 Strategic Statement and the PRIA process

The NSW Government's June 2020 Strategic Statement on Coal Exploration and Mining outlines the NSW Government's approach to transitioning to renewable energy and supporting the economy and aims to improve certainty about where mining should not occur. It identified 14 potential future coal exploration release areas (NSW Government, 2020). The Hawkins and Rumker potential release areas were identified in this Statement; the Ganguddy-Kelgoola area, which sits adjacent to Hawkins and Rumker, is also identified in this statement.

Following the release of the Strategic Statement, the NSW Government Advisory Body for Strategic Release has requested the Hawkins and Rumker areas be put through the Preliminary Regional Issues Assessment (PRIA) process (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE), 2021a). Ganguddy-Kelgoola is expected to go through the PRIA process in the near future once further exploration is completed.

The PRIA process, also set out in the Strategic Release Framework (NSW Government, 2020), is an initial assessment of social, environmental and economic matters relating to areas that could be released for exploration. In theory, it involves engaging with interested and potentially impacted stakeholders to identify issues for consideration.

RRCFC's Our Value, Our Future

This report is the Rylstone Region Coal Free Community's (RRCFC's) submission to the PRIA process on *Our Value, Our Future*. Separate submissions for a range of other issues are also being submitted by the RRCFC. The RRCFC recognises that coal exploration is a precursor to coal mining, and therefore it is predominantly the mining phase that is considered in this submission. The RRCFC strongly opposes the release of Hawkins and Rumker as coal exploration areas.

The Choice: Our Community, Our Future.

For us, the choice is clear.

'In short, an open cut coal mine in this part of the Gloucester valley would be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Wrong place because an open cut coal mine in this scenic and cultural landscape, proximate to many people's homes and farms, will cause significant planning, amenity, visual and social impacts. Wrong time because the GHG emissions of the coal mine and its coal product will increase global total concentrations of GHGs at a time when what is now urgently needed, in order to meet generally agreed climate targets, is a rapid and deep decrease in GHG emissions. These dire consequences should be avoided. The Project should be refused.'

Decision rejecting the coal mine: Gloucester Resources Limited v Minister for Planning [2019] NSWLEC 7 (Preston CJ), 8 February 2019.

THIS



OR THIS?



This is our home. We will not let it be destroyed by a new coal mine.

We will stand as a community and fight to protect the land, heritage, culture & community for present and future generations.

It is the RRCFC's strongly held view that the PRIA should find that the proposed exploration areas should not be opened for exploration under the Strategic Framework and it and the Advisory Board recommend against release of the proposed areas. Coal exploration should not proceed in the Hawkins and Rumker areas.

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1 | Introduction

1.1 Preliminary Regional Issues Assessment (PRIA) Process

The NSW Government's Advisory Body for Strategic Release has asked the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) to prepare a Preliminary Regional Issues Assessment (PRIA) (DPIE, 2021) to consider the benefits, opportunities, risks and constraints of releasing two adjacent areas located near Rylstone in the Mid-Western Regional local government area.

These areas are shown in and include:

- Hawkins - an area of 14,900 ha located directly north of Rylstone, and
- Rumker - an area of 17,800 ha located directly north east of Rylstone.

An initial assessment of resource potential undertaken by the Division of Mining, Exploration and Geoscience within the Department of Regional NSW has identified coal resources within the Hawkins and Rumker areas that could be mined by underground mining methods (DPIE, 2021). It is noted that these areas could just as well be mined using aboveground methods.

In June 2020, the NSW Government released the Strategic Statement on Coal Exploration and Mining (NSW Government, 2020). The Strategic Statement "outlines the NSW Government's approach to transitioning to renewable energy and supporting the economy and aims to improve certainty about where mining should not occur." It identified 14 potential future coal exploration release areas (NSW Government, 2020).

Adjacent to Hawkins and Rumker is the area of Ganguddy – Kelgoola, which is slated to go through the PRIA process once further exploration is completed (NSW Government, 2020).

1.2 PRIA Preparation

The PRIA process is also set out in the Strategic Release Framework (NSW Government, 2020). It is an initial assessment of social, environmental and economic matters relating to areas that could be released for exploration. In theory, it involves engaging with interested and potentially impacted stakeholders to identify issues for consideration.

DPIE has engaged Resource Strategies to undertake 'preparation of a Preliminary Regional Issues Assessment document in relation to a defined area that could be released for coal exploration' for a sum of \$167,156 (NSW Government eTendering, 2021).

On its website Resource Strategies (2021) says it facilitates development approvals for major mining and associated infrastructure projects and prepares comprehensive and timely environmental assessment documentation with the assistance of recognised experts across all environmental fields.

The DPIE undertakes the PRIA and submits this to the Advisory Body for Strategic Release, which considers potential release areas, reviews reports and recommends assessment of the release of an area for resource exploration. The Advisory Body for Strategic Release makes recommendations to the Minister for Regional NSW and these are considered by Cabinet and, if approved, the Minister for Regional NSW releases an area for exploration and invites companies to apply for a prospecting title.



1.3 Rylstone Region Coal Free Community

1.3.1 RRCFC

The Rylstone Region Coal Free Community (RRCFC) is a group of self-funded, like-minded local residents, and supporters, of the Rylstone Region committed to stopping further exploration of coal and approval of mines in our region. Our aim is to protect the land, heritage, culture and community for now and future generations.

1.3.2 Purpose of this report

This report is the RRCFC's submission to the PRIA process on *Our Community and Our Future*. Separate submissions for a range of other issues are also being submitted by the RRCFC. The RRCFC recognises that coal exploration is a precursor to coal mining, and therefore it is predominantly the mining phase that is considered in this submission.

The RRCFC's aim is to protect the land, heritage, culture & community for now and future generations. This submission shows us, our community, our land, our water, our heritage, our landscapes, our economy. It considers who we are, what we value and what is now at risk with the proposed exploration and mining in the Hawkins and Rumker areas. We will fight to protect what we have here is special and we will fight to protect it.

There is no rational case for destroying the sustainability of this area, community and its future.

It is the RRCFC's strongly held view that the PRIA should find that the proposed exploration areas should not be opened for exploration under the Strategic Framework and it and the Advisory Board recommend against release of the proposed areas.

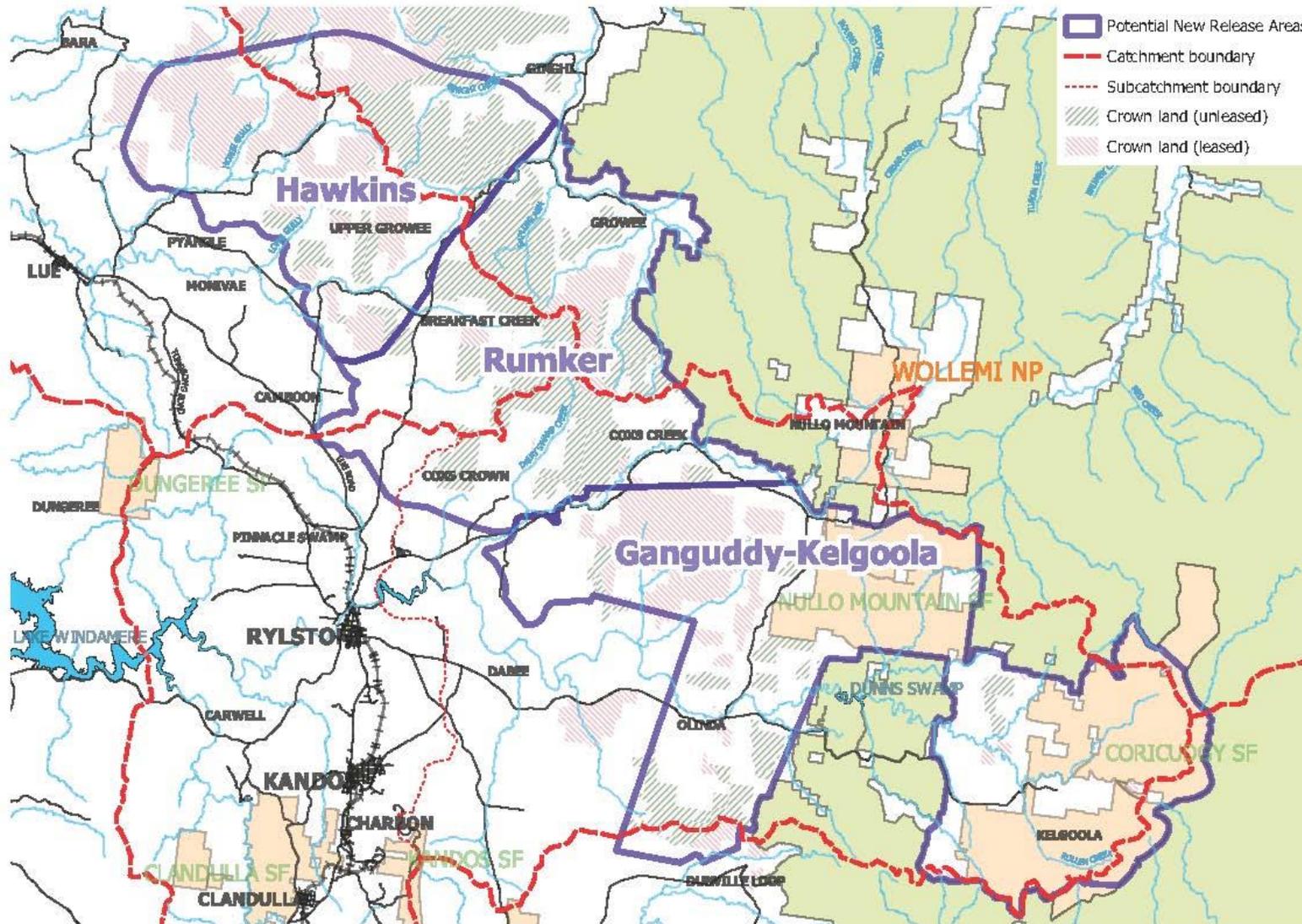


Figure 1 The proposed exploration areas (note only Hawkins and Rumker being considered in this PRIA)



2 | Our community

2.1 Our resilience

Rylstone, Kandos, Lue and the surrounding lands are our home, our community. Some of us and our families have been here for tens of thousands of years; some of us have been here for many generations; and others of us have moved here in recent decades.



We are a strong and resilient community.

We have experienced drought, fires, floods, COVID-19, a mouse plague and now the threat of coal exploration and mining.

After years of a crippling drought, our animals and the wildlife, were weakened and dying

We ran out of water.



Many farmers were on their knees.



This is what happens when you take away the water



Then our area was ravaged in the Black Summer bushfires, when the Kerry Ridge and Gaspers Mountain fire converged and burnt through hundreds of thousands of hectares across this region.



It burnt the forests, paddocks, destroyed sheds, fences and our infrastructure



Our community fought. We fought to protect the land, to save our plants and animals. To protect our farms our homes and livelihoods.



After the fire, the rains came...



The land and our community are recovering. We are rebuilding.

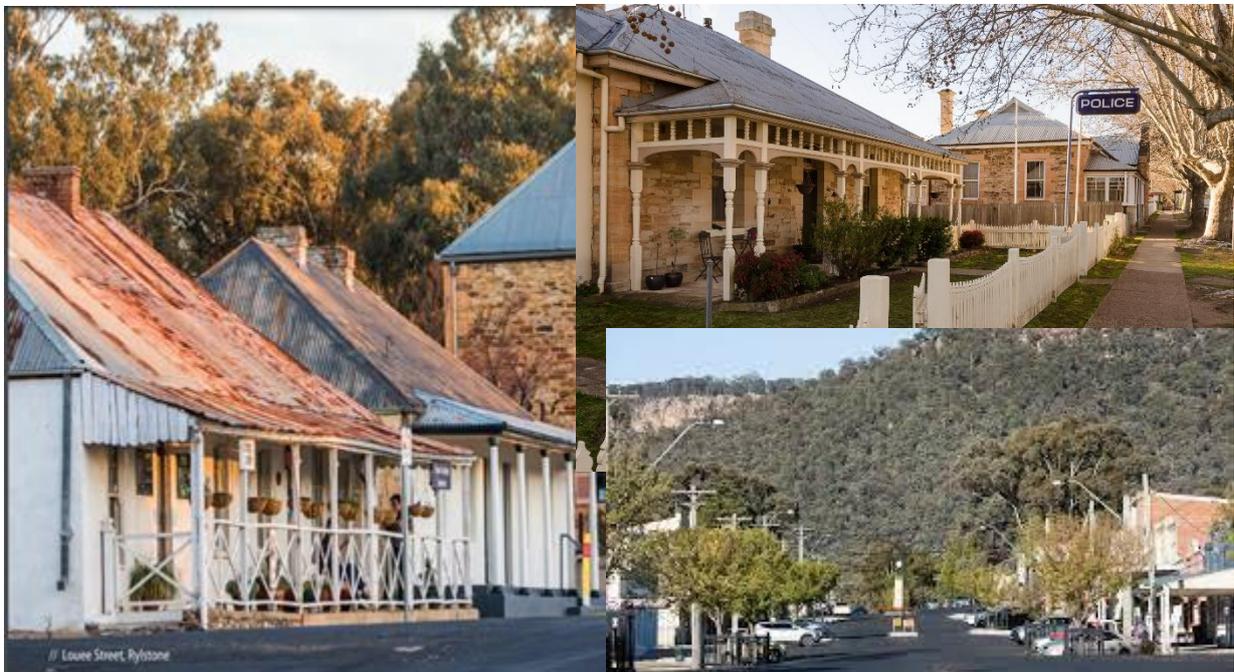


2.2 Our home

This is our home, our community. It is a very special part of the world.



We love the character of our towns.



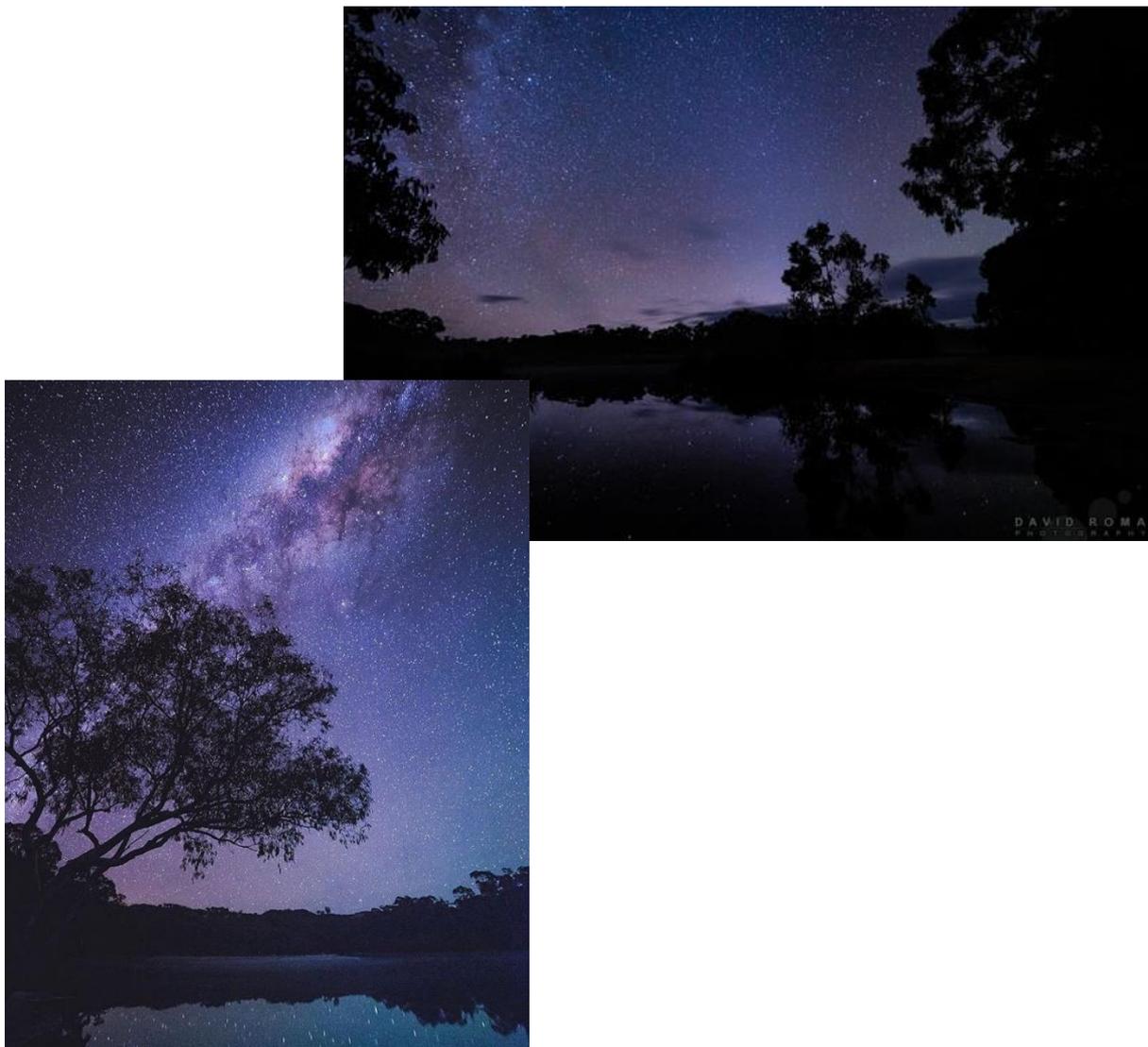
We love the vibrancy of our community, and welcome friends, family and visitors here.



The funky, eclectic shops and cafes



Our big non-light polluted, clear night skies bring astronomy enthusiasts from all over the world to gaze in wonder.



Our region is home to an amazing diversity of birdlife that attracts twitchers from far and wide



It has breath-taking vistas, and amazing wilderness areas.



We have the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area on our doorstep.



Home to one of the world's rarest and oldest living plants.



We have clean air to breathe and pristine waters flowing through our lands, giving life.



We have a tranquil rural environment



This region nurtures its peoples as well as threatened animals, plants and ecological communities.



This is our home. We will not let it be destroyed by a new coal mine.

We will stand as a community and fight to protect the land, heritage, culture & community for present and future generations.

We will not let all that is so precious here be destroyed for the chance of short-term profits



We will continue to fight to protect the land, heritage, culture & community for present and future generations.

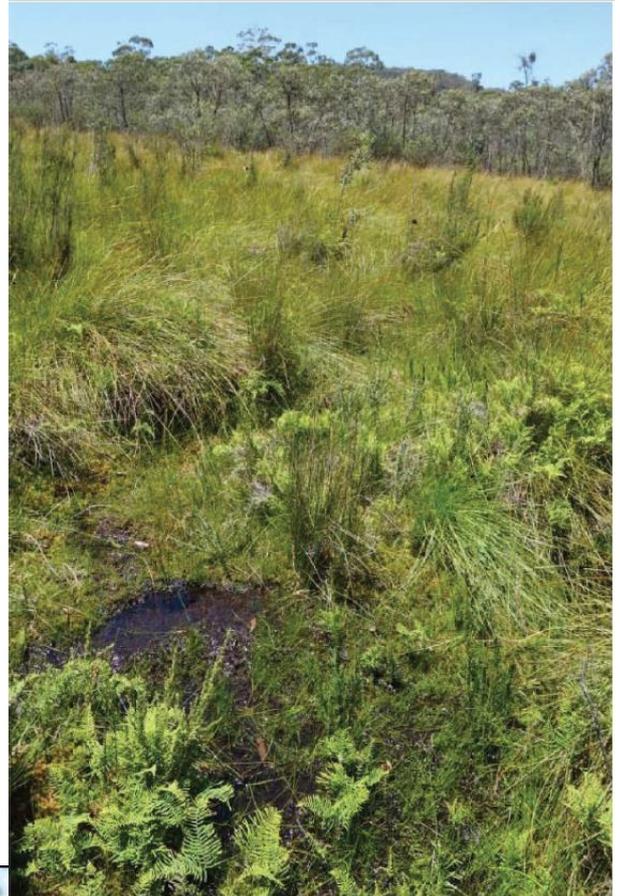
3 | Our future

3.1 Mid-Western Regional Local Environmental Plan (MWR LEP) 2012, Aims of Plan:

“(b) to encourage the proper management, development and conservation of resources within Mid-Western Regional by protecting, enhancing and conserving native plants and animals”

“The Commission has considered the merits of both the Project and Recommended Revised Project and finds that....neither are compatible with land use objectives (b) and (c) of the MWR LEP 2012.....”

Independent Planning Commission, Statement of reasons for decision, Bylong Coal Project, 18 September 2019



Rylstone Region Coal Free Community



“(c) to provide a secure future for agriculture through the protection of agricultural land capability and by maximising opportunities for sustainable rural and primary production pursuits”



The Commission has considered the merits of both the Project and Recommended Revised Project and finds that....neither are compatible with land use objectives (b) and (c) of the MWR LEP 2012”

Independent Planning Commission, Statement of reasons for decision, Bylong Coal Project, 18 September 2019



“(d) to foster a sustainable and vibrant economy that supports and celebrates the Mid-Western Regional’s rural, natural and heritage attributes”

“The Commission has considered the merits of both the Project and Recommended Revised Project and finds that...[it] would result in a net economic benefit to NSW during the operation of the mine. However, the Commission is of the view that the distribution of costs and benefits over and beyond the life of the mine is temporally inequitable in that the economic benefits accrue to the current generation and the environmental, agricultural and heritage costs are borne by future generations. The Commission also finds that there is a reasonable level of uncertainty in the estimation of economic benefits...”

Independent Planning Commission, Statement of reasons for decision, Bylong Coal Project, 18 September 2019

3.2 Mid-Western Regional Local Environmental Plan 2012, RU1 land use zone's objectives:

“to maintain the visual amenity and landscape quality of Mid-Western Regional by preserving the area’s open rural landscapes and environmental and cultural heritage values.”



“to encourage sustainable primary industry production by maintaining and enhancing the natural resource base.”

“The Commission has adopted Preston CJ’s guidance on likely preferred uses in Gloucester Resources v Minister as referring to uses of the land that, having regard to land use trends, are likely to be the preferred uses of land in the vicinity.



The Commission considers that the MWLEP 2012 is a relevant presentation of what land uses are most likely to be considered the preferred uses of land in the vicinity of the Project.

The commission notes that the majority of the zone’s objectives [RU1] are associated with maintaining agricultural lands, rural, scenic and heritage qualities and minimising conflict between land uses.



Mining would be a new land use in a predominately agricultural setting, surrounded by State Forests and National Parks. The Preliminary Assessment Report stated that “[e]xpansion of the mining industry into the Bylong valley area has the potential to create land use conflicts with existing agricultural industries, including cattle grazing operations”.

Independent Planning Commission, Statement of reasons for decision, Bylong Coal Project, 18 September 2019

The Department considers that.....

- *given the very large number of significantly affected groundwater users, the rural-residential and small-scale agricultural land use of the area, and the greenfields nature of the project, the impacts are likely to lead to significant dispute and disruption in the local community, and consequently, the project is not compatible with the rural land uses in the vicinity of the development.....*
- *the project would have amenity impacts on a number of rural-residential land users in the Medway Road area, including noise and visual impacts, as well as impacts on the cultural landscape.....*

.....For these reasons..... the Hume Coal Project as currently proposed and the associated Berrima Rail Project are not in the public interest and recommends the Commission refuses to grant consent for these projects.

Department of Planning Industry and Environment Assessment Report, Hume Coal Project and Berrima Rail Project. June 2021

Solastalgia: *‘the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault. It is manifest in an attack on one’s sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation.’*

(Albrecht, 2005)

.....the place where one resides and that one loves

“The importance of the landscape setting is moreover elevated by the value placed on it by the community.... As the natural beauty of the area is widely recognised, the extent of its interruption by the project requires evaluation”.

Independent Planning Commission, Statement of reasons for decision, Bylong Coal Project, 18 September 2019



.....an attack on one's sense of place



.....the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place



.....a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation



This loss is both at a local and global level. We are faced with the prospect of an enormous coal mine destroying our homes, while globally climate change is threatening our planet, and potentially life as we know it. It will make our droughts, floods and fires far worse. The coal from this mine would be a huge increase of greenhouse gas

“The Commission has considered the merits of both the Project and Recommended Revised Project and finds that the cumulative environmental impact....needs to be considered when weighing up the acceptability of GHG emissions associated with the mine. The Commission finds it is rational to refuse fossil fuel developments with greater environmental, social and economic impacts...as this not only achieves the goal of not increasing GHG emissions but also achieves the collateral benefit of preventing those greater environmental, social and economic impacts”

Independent Planning Commission, Statement of reasons for decision, Bylong Coal Project, 18 September 2019

4 | Conclusion

There is no rational case for destroying the sustainability of this area, community and its future.

It is the RRCFC's strongly held view that the PRIA should find that the proposed exploration areas should not be opened for exploration under the Strategic Framework and that it recommends against release of the proposed areas, and the Advisory Body should rule that coal exploration should not proceed in the Hawkins and Rumker areas.



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