



Rylstone Region Coal Free Community

Hawkins Rumker PRIA Submission: Health and Social impacts

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Acknowledgement of Country

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

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. 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.

The PRIA process, also set out in the Strategic Release Framework, 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 Health and Social Impacts Submission

This report is the Rylstone Region Coal Free Community's (RRCFC's) submission to the PRIA process on Health and Social Impacts. 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.

Negative impact on social determinants of health – clean air

The RRCFC opposes the Hawkins Rumker proposal due to the potential health risks from particulate matter $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} , of which there are no safe exposure levels, and which are strongly associated with hospitalisation and death for a range of cardio-pulmonary and cardiovascular diseases. The RRCFC rejects any notion that health can be maintained with correct monitoring.

The RRCFC opposes the Hawkins and Rumker proposal due to the projected contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. Using an estimation of extracting 20 million tonnes per annum, an increase of 48.5 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per annum would result from burning this coal (2182 million tonnes over 45 years for 910 million megatonnes). This figure excludes fugitive emissions from the mine. This is inconsistent with the Paris Agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the International Net Zero by 2050 target.

The RRCFC opposes the Hawkins Rumker proposal as it would directly contradict the known evidence linking fossil fuels, climate change and health.

Negative impact on social determinants of health – clean water

The RRCFC opposes the Hawkins Rumker proposal due to the impact mining techniques and coal extraction have on clean water. The proposal has the potential for significant loss of water, destruction of water capturing ecosystems, and destruction of carbon capturing ecosystems. The Rylstone Dam is

the sole water supply for the townships of Rylstone, Kandos, Charbon and Clandulla (population ca 2400). The Rylstone Dam is fed by the many catchments in the Hawkins and Rumkins areas. The water required to extract the previous estimate of 20 million tonnes per annum, is 12,000 megaliters per annum, four times the capacity of the dam. Water contamination is a risk from mining activities and underground aquifers can be cracked and drained even in the exploratory stage.

Negative impact on social determinants of health – stress and mental health

The RRCFC opposes the Hawkins Rumker proposal due to the negative impact on stress levels and mental health. Evidence shows that people can experience high levels of anxiety and stress about the threat to their region, economic stability and devaluing land values, even at the stage when a mine is proposed. Psychological impacts continue when landscapes change, such as those that occur with large scale developments including mining.

Negative impact on social determinants of health – housing and available services

The RRCFC opposes the Hawkins Rumker proposal due to its potential negative impacts on housing and availability of services. These impacts will not be outweighed by the promises of investment in the local community through claims of employment opportunities.

The development of mining operations generally results in rapid population growth, decreasing housing availability and increasing prices. This disproportionately impacts low-income households and often forces them out of the community or results in homelessness.

Rapid population growth often leaves communities with insufficient infrastructure and local services to meet the increased demand. Local governments and businesses are often hesitant to invest in increased services for the growing community, which is viewed as transient and/or short term, resulting in a lag time between the population growth and increased services.

Negative impact on social determinants of health – employment

The RRCFC opposes the Hawkins Rumker proposal due to its potential negative impacts on employment. These impacts will not be outweighed by the promises of investment in the local community through claims of employment opportunities. The mining industry currently accounts for only two percent of employment in the area; whilst Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing accounts for 22 percent and tourism nine percent. These industries are incompatible with mining. Developing a coal mine is not fostering a sustainable economy, and putting over 30 percent of long-term sustainable employment at risk.

Negative impact on social determinants of health – living conditions

The RRCFC opposes the Hawkins Rumker proposal due to its potential negative impacts on living conditions. Communities with large non-resident transient male workforces can lead to increased alcohol and substance abuse, and increased violent crime including physical and sexual assault in host

communities. Areas with large non-resident workforces have also reported a decline in community networks, community identity and community cohesion.

Health impacts of environmental noise pollution include hearing impairment, increased blood pressure, ischemic heart disease, sleep disturbance, and psychosocial effects such as annoyance and reduced performance. Nocturnal environmental noise pollution is thought to be the most significant form of noise pollution in terms of health consequences, due to its interference on biological systems through sleep disturbances.

Negative impact on social determinants of health – cultural heritage

There are currently 28 publicly listed Aboriginal cultural sites in the proposed Hawkins Rumker release area. This is a gross underestimation of the actual number of sites in the area and more are currently being identified. Country and access to country has highly significant cultural, spiritual and social importance to Aboriginal peoples. Damage or destruction of land leads to significant negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples, impacting their identity, sense of belonging, culture and spirituality, and results in continued intergenerational trauma. Small buffer zones around individual sites do nothing to protect the sites from disruption, nor do they protect Country from being transformed and/or destroyed, or culture being destroyed.

Conclusion

The level of community opposition to the Hawkins Rumker potential proposed release area, with concerns raised regarding the impacts on the community's physical and mental health, access to water, housing and services, and impacts on Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, clearly indicate that a social license to operate for this project has not been achieved.

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