

Hawkins Rumker PRA Submission

The Mudgee District Environment Group (MDEG) is based in the Mid-Western Region local government area of NSW, within the central tablelands on the Great Dividing Range. This includes the towns of Mudgee, Gulgong, Rylstone and Kandos, and all surrounding localities. Our members come from diverse backgrounds and occupations, and varying ages. One thing we have in common is a love of this region. We value its heritage, history, ecology, landscape, climate, and community.

MDEG believes that if the Hawkins Rumker Potential Release Area (PRA) is opened for coal exploration, this would be a likely pre-cursor to coal mining occurring. Coal mining in the PRA would negatively impact all aspects of our region's natural and societal environment. MDEG believes that the values fundamental to this area must be protected and is of the strong opinion that coal exploration should not proceed in the Hawkins Rumker PRA.

The negative impacts would extend well beyond this region and are almost too numerous to list. Our concerns include, but are not limited to the following:

Climate change: Greenhouse gases emitted during construction, operation, transport of coal and burning of coal, would be in direct and complete opposition to global expectation and agreement. The consequences for the planet if we do not stop all further fossil fuel extraction are well known. It is illogical to consider opening a greenfield area for coal exploration. It is also counter to the stated NSW government policy of reaching Net Zero emission by 2050.

Community collapse and uncertainty: When an area is released for coal exploration, land values drop, uncertainty prevails in the community, investment declines, visitor and tourism numbers decrease, the towns and localities become unviable. We have seen this in our region at Ulan and Wollar. There is no reason a similar fate should befall the Rylstone/Kandos area.

Health and mental health: These negative impacts are inter-generational and often somewhat hidden, as poor outcomes in health and mental health of an individual effect the household, community, and the next generation. The financial costs associated with managing health impacts are generally only acknowledged within the initial circumstance. This is a gross underestimate of the on-going and widespread effects.

Water supply and quality: Coal mining intercepts groundwater, breaks and pollutes aquifers, and reduces flow in streams, springs, and rivers. This impact cannot be sustained in an area that is agricultural and tourism dependent. Water is life, and negative impacts on water obviously produce negative impacts on all life – natural and agricultural ecosystems, human populations, downstream ecosystems, and populations.

Degradation of land: By the nature of the activity coal mining clears land of vegetation, adds to the potential for erosion, produces dust and risks subsidence. This degradation is entirely preventable. The PRA is located within a stunning landscape that is valued by all for many different reasons. If it transforms to a coal mine, there would be irreparable damage to this landscape. Present and future generations would lose.

Loss of biodiversity: The Hawkins Rumker area is home to a wonderful diversity of native plants, animals, and birds. Many rare and threatened species find a suitable habitat in this landscape which is a buffer zone to the World Heritage area of the Greater Blue Mountains National Park. If mining were to occur this buffer zone would be lost and the biodiversity would be reduced – another matter that is the opposite to global expectations and agreement.

Aboriginal and cultural heritage: It is regrettable that the Review of Environmental Factors that informed the early stages of this PRA was flawed in this matter. Aboriginal people are intrinsically linked to the landscape. The local Dabee people lived along the Cudgegong River and surrounds. Their social and cultural life is tied to the land here. There are many sites that are significant. All appropriate consultation and searches must be undertaken before any potential exploration occurs. Exploration should only occur with informed consent and agreement from the Aboriginal people.

Economic viability: Global demand for coal is declining; investment in fossil fuel is declining. If coal mining were to proceed in the PRA, the whole enterprise would likely end up a stranded asset. On the other hand, agriculture and tourism in the PRA district is thriving. The rural and natural landscape is a magnet for all tourists, who consume or purchase the value-added products from the local agricultural output. There is a vibrant local economy with a diverse range of businesses, creating a strong rotation of money within the region. This vibrant community and economy should not be put at risk.

We refer you to a study of the western coalfields (including Hawkins Rumker) undertaken by Earthscapes in May 2021. We are of the opinion that this provides more complete and up-to-date data and analysis than the Review of Environmental Factors. We commend the study to you. It is available here:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/lockthegate/pages/7317/attachments/original/1623889487/Western_Coalfields_Earthscapes_ReportV3.pdf?1623889487

MDEG strongly objects to coal exploration being permitted in the Hawkins Rumker area.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important matter.

Sincerely



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Chair: Mudgee District Environment Group

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