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John Hann, Chair

Professor Garry Willgoose and Professor Chris Fell AM

Panel members

Independent Planning Commission

<https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/projects/2018/11/vickery-extension-project>

Further submission re. proposed Vickery Extension Project

At the Vickery Extension Project public hearing, I was asked a question in relation to social impacts of mining in the Narrabri region. On my behalf the Environmental Defender's Office requested clarification of the question being asked and was provided with the following:

The Panel heard from speakers at the public hearing regarding positive social impacts associated with mining. Does Dr Ziller consider that there are any examples of positive social impacts as a result of mining?

I provide my response to this question below.

Yours sincerely

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There are some positive social impacts of mining which I set out below. But each of these is also associated, directly or indirectly, with an adverse social outcome.

1 **Jobs**

These may be local or distributed across the state or nation. Local jobs are often claimed as an important social benefit for a town or region. A project which maintains or increases local employment has flow on social benefits for those employed. The several downsides of this are:

- the estimate of local jobs is often over-stated
- jobs estimates are vulnerable to changing technologies and markets
- the jobs claim engages local interests in a very fundamental way, tending to pit one occupation group against another.

A social conflict over jobs is not a social benefit.

2 **Local financial contributions**

Mining companies often make financial contributions to community organisations. These can be used for social benefit although the dollar amount is not itself a social benefit.

Example: a donation used to buy sports equipment to enable a sporting club to operate is a social benefit.

However, mining companies tend to sponsor some activities but not others. The choice of activity does not seem to be related to the level of social benefit that could be achieved. Donations 'bias' is not a social benefit.

Example: It seems relatively rare to find a mining company sponsoring a domestic violence refuge, a mental health counsellor or an affordable housing unit.

3 **Local promises and undertakings.**

Mining companies make statements which can be construed as promises by local people and interpreted as a social benefit. However, the promise itself is not a social benefit. The social benefit requires delivery of the promise.

Example: a promise to provide scholarships or skills training is not a social benefit unless and until it is delivered.

4 **Community engagement**

Mining companies may present their community engagement processes as a social benefit, citing shop front information availability, a community engagement team in the town, information nights etc. These are benefits to the company (not social benefits) because their aim is to reduce ill will in the resident community.

While information provision should be a neutral activity, these community engagement processes tend to create publicity for the beneficiaries of the mine (jobs, donations etc.)

omitting the consequences for non-beneficiaries (still unemployed, loss of land / amenity etc.).

Mining companies fund publicity for social benefit claims but not for social loss or exclusion impacts of a project. In this way companies' engagement processes fund social division.

5 **Economies of scale**

Often regarded as an economic benefit, an increase in population in a town can increase the number of people available to participate in community events, volunteer, and make their weekly purchases locally. Increased population is often cited, therefore, as a social benefit. This claim is vulnerable to the jobs claim. The local population will only increase if there are new jobs in the town likely to attract a resident, as distinct from a fly in fly out (FIFO), population.

However, FIFO is preferred by many workers, or their families, and automation and good information technology (IT) make it increasingly possible for some people to work from other places. Further I have not seen any evidence to support the contention that incomers join local voluntary groups but I have heard anecdotally that this often does not occur.

6 **Landscaping and beautification**

Mining companies often propose tree screens, embankments and other barriers as social benefits that will address loss of visual amenity. There may also be offers to contribute to town beautification. Given the nature of mining, these gestures rarely re-instate the landscapes lost. In the case of open cut mines, the loss of visual amenity is for the best part of a life time and possibly (given the high rate of abandonment of exhausted mines) forever.

The more open cut mines in a region, the greater the loss.