

Mr Sam Haddad  
Director General  
Coal and Gas Strategy  
Department of Planning  
GPO Box 39 Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Mr Haddad,

**Submission: NSW Coal and Gas Strategy Scoping Paper**

Mid Western Community Action Group (MWCAN) formed over concern regarding the rapid and recent expansion of coal mining and exploration and Coal Seam Gas (CSG) exploration in the Mid Western region of NSW. The Mid Western Region is located within the 'Western Coal Resource Area' described in the NSW Coal and Gas Strategy Scoping Paper. Locations affected include Bylong (which encompasses Mt Penny and Coggan), Ulan, Wollar, Mudgee, Rylstone, Kandos, Capertee, Charbon, Ilford, Cherry Tree Hill, Mt Vincent and Running Stream.

On behalf of MWCAN, I would like to make the following submission in response to the NSW Coal and Gas Strategy Scoping Paper.

The Scoping paper makes little or no reference to development of any alternative energy supply. The paper is written on the premise that coal mining and Coal Seam Gas (CSG) mining will rapidly expand in the areas mapped and that only some fine tuning of process and regulation to 'facilitate sustainable development' needs to take place.

In 2003 coal accounted for more than 35% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions and in 2003 Australia's coal exports alone were responsible for 733 million tonnes of greenhouse emissions.

MWCAN believes that seeking and implementing renewable energy alternatives should be a priority. Renewable energy is an industry not just for the future, it is commercially proven and economically affordable today.

It is difficult to take the comments regarding community health in the scoping paper seriously. If the real impacts on health were considered then the Government would be working hard to phase out the mining and CSG industries as quickly as possible. Mining, coal transportation, coal fired power stations and the processes involved in CSG extraction all produce emissions and pollution that are extremely dangerous to our health. The PM2.5 parts per million and less atmospheric emissions mining creates are especially dangerous and are just one example.

PM1 open cut emissions in the Hunter Valley have been estimated to be as high as 250 micrograms per cubic metre. The United States (US), Japan and Finland have had identical Federal Clean Air Acts in place since the 1990s to ensure emissions are kept below 15 microns per cubic metre.

The New South Wales government does not require the measurements of these size particles and at present and there is no federal legislation. US research concluded that the total cost of people

getting ill and dying prematurely as a result of coal production and coal fired- power station pollution was five times the value of the coal.

Previous NSW governments have indicated that the population density of the Hunter Valley was not high enough to warrant an investigation of the impacts of mining on health in that region. This is extremely alarming for our less populated Mid Western region. MWCAN believes that complete and independent studies on the full health impacts of mining and CSG extraction should be carried out prior to further mining exploration and leases being granted.

For the scoping paper to imply that methane or coal seam gas exploration and extraction is a cleaner, transition energy in comparison to coal mining is completely misleading and untrue. Hundreds of examples of the irreparable environmental, social and economic damage this method of mining has caused all over the world are readily available.

CSG extraction requires dewatering of aquifers. This alone will destroy the tracts of agricultural land that rely on those aquifers. It appears that the CSG industry is determined to systematically dewater the entire Great Artesian Basin (northwest of our region). Government officials in Queensland have admitted that this supply of ancient water is a finite resource but are not prepared to halt the CSG industry's rapid expansion.

The huge volume of water extracted, handled and subsequently polluted by CSG mining is highly saline and is pumped to the surface, ponded, trucked out or forced back underground. All these processes allow contamination of this water with other clean water supplies. CSG extraction is not the clean and green industry it is being presented as.

Broke community representatives in the Hunter Valley were recently told by the Department of Environment in NSW that the CSG industry is not covered by the Protection of the Environment Act, the NSW Water Act or by the Federal Water Act. MWCAN would like assurance that this 'redneck' industry is included under these Acts as every other primary production industry is.

Our Mid Western community cannot help but treat the scoping paper with a degree of scepticism and distrust. With the expansion of the Ulan, Wilpinjong and Moolarben coal mines and the plethora of mining exploratory licence applications over our region we know we are in 'direct line of fire'. If mining development continues at the current rate, our community and region will never be the same. The once beautiful Hunter Valley is a constant reminder to us of the permanent destruction mining causes to a region.

Trust in the Government processes involved in exploration and the granting of mining licences and the regulation of the mining industry is at an all time low. Lack of information and secrecy surrounding land purchase and granting of mining leases is always the case. It is essential that this process becomes completely transparent. Who will have input into the assessment of Part 3A and mining act amendments and developing policy surrounding aquifer interference? Will these processes be transparent?

The NSW coal mining industry's record of non – compliance with their EPA licences is substantial. A list of 2,639 recorded incidents between 2000 and 2006 makes it difficult to believe that regulation

compliance is enforced. The recent flood emergency variations in discharge licences for Ulan, Wilpinjong and Moolarben allowing all 3 mines to discharge untreated water into the Goulburn River causing unfathomable environmental damage, makes a mockery of the regulations in the first place. Our community needs assurance that similar incidents will not occur.

MWCAN believes that the health and long term sustainability of a highly productive agricultural region (spanning 180 years) such as ours should be the Government's main objectives. Coal mining is an industry that is not sustainable in the long term. In localities where coal mining is taking place, the impact on the environment and community is wide reaching and permanent. Mining exploratory licenses are now held over prime agricultural country in the Mid Western Region (for example, the Mt Penny lease in the Bylong Valley). If the Government will not protect these areas from mining development then the reassuring statements, surrounding a region's best interests listed in the scoping paper become nothing more than platitudes.

Our community needs assurance that exploration and mining will not occur in any location prior to expert studies and mapping of water and soil and without detailed real-time baseline measurements of water, air and noise being made. Cumulative impacts must be determined and long-term (over 100 years) cost benefit analysis must be performed. This analysis must include all external costs, for example, green house gas emissions and impact on other industries in the area.

Cumulative impact assessment of existing mining operations, review of compliance with conditions of approval and environmental management plans are also essential before any further exploratory and mining leases are granted.

In 2009 the Central West was ranked in the top 20 tourist destinations in Australia. Tourism and tourism-related industries have a higher labour intensity than mining. Between 1996 and 2001 mining employment in the Hunter Valley dropped by 27% while production doubled. Tourism is a long term and sustainable industry which can only be damaged if not destroyed by the expansion of coal mining.

Mudgee is already experiencing the artificially inflated housing market as a result of the growing mining population which has lead to a lack of affordable housing for non mining families and locals. Lack of available accommodation for tourists visiting the region is becoming a widespread problem.

The Mid Western Regional Council is feeling the financial cost of upgrades to mine related infrastructure, for example, the massive cost to upgrade the Cassilis Rd which services Ulan, Moolarben and Willpinjong mines.

The local community is experiencing the loss of tradespeople and rural youth from the district to the mining industry. Local businesses cannot compete with the wages offered by the mining giants.

The Mid Western Community Action Network would appreciate acknowledgement of this submission and some indication that it has been read and considered.