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Legislative Assembly Hansard (Extract)

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WALLARAH NO. 2 UNDERGROUND COAL PROJECT

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Mr JEFF HUNTER (Lake Macquarie) [5.37 p.m.]: Tonight I raise community concerns about the proposed Wallarah No. 2 underground coal project. In May this year Wyong Areas Coal Joint Venture, the company exploring the Wyong area coal reserves, announced it was moving forward with a plan to mine an area west of the F3 freeway in the Wyong shire. The company said that it would seek approval to extract coal from seams between 350 and 650 metres below the surface. The coal would be mined over 42 years from beneath the Dooralong Valley and State Forest and brought by a four kilometre underground drift to the pit top at Tooheys Road near the intersection of the Doyalson link road and the F3. The coal would be moved from the site by rail.

This announcement caused a great deal of concern amongst local residents, who subsequently approached me for assistance. The area, while currently in the electorate of Wyong, will form part of the redrawn Lake Macquarie electorate at the election in March next year. I have received a number of letters from concerned local residents and met with the community group fighting the coalmine proposal, the Australian Gas Alliance [AGA]. That same group fought the Sydney Gas proposal to extract methane gas from this area. I also attended the public meeting held on 27 August at Wyong to discuss the coal proposal. Since then I have again met with the AGA and have received its "Submission on the Impact of Longwall Coal Mining on the Proclaimed Wyong Water Catchment Valleys (Dooralong and Yarramalong Valleys)". Alan Hayes, the AGA spokesperson, stated in a letter to me:

Dear Jeff

Further to our various conversations and meetings I confirm acknowledgement of your support to protect the public water resources drawn from the Wyong Water Catchment.

As you are aware, the Wyong valleys (Dooralong and Yarramalong) account for fifty per cent (50%) of the water resource for the entire Central Coast of NSW. They were proclaimed as a water catchment area in 1950, gazette number 153 of the Local Government Act 1919.

Additionally, the Wyong River and Creek, Wyong catchment weir and the 'pump pool' of the Mardi dam are located within the horizontal subsidence zone of the proposed coal mine project. This horizontal subsidence zone also encroaches on the northern boundary of Mardi dam and a portion of the dam itself, which was proclaimed water catchment in 1987.

There are also a number of international waders, recorded under the Australian Government agreements with China and Japan, whose fragile habitat is entirely dependent upon the health of the water catchment river systems, and thirty-three (33) endangered or threatened species of flora and fauna within the catchment valleys.

Longwall coal mining not only poses a threat to the water supply, both surface and subsurface, it also poses a threat to the habitat of the various endangered and threatened species of flora and fauna.

To enable yourself to fully understand the disastrous impact that longwall coal mining will have upon the water supply and the environment, a precise report is attached, with extracted information from a report commissioned by the original lease holders that supports the fact that the integrity of the surface and subsurface groundwater systems could be compromised.

It is interesting to note that a report on the Jilliby Jilliby creek, prepared in 2004 by River Care, in association

with Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority, National Heritage Trust and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, declared this water system as one of the most pristine in New South Wales. This report also condemns the damage that will be caused by the impact of longwall coal mining.

The letter goes on to say that should I require additional information, the AGA would be happy to provide it to me. The submission outlines the principal concerns about the coalmine, including: likely water contamination; potential loss of aquifers and water catchment river systems; and the potential loss of 50 per cent of our drinking water catchment. It lists in detail the concerns of the local community. I have forwarded this submission to the Minister for Planning, Frank Sartor, and the Minister for the Environment, Bob Debus, and the Minister for Water Utilities, David Campbell, and asked for meetings with them so that members of a delegation from the AGA can put their case and their concerns about this proposed coalmine.

I share many of the concerns raised by the AGA and the valley communities. I do not support any proposal that will threaten the water supplies of the Central Coast. I look forward to meeting in coming weeks with Ministers Sartor, Debus and Campbell and the AGA. I also look forward to a meeting on Thursday with the Minister for the Central Coast, the Hon. Grant McBride, so that we can raise the local community's concerns.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE (The Entrance—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for the Central Coast) [5.42 p.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Lake Macquarie for his active involvement in this issue and his commitment to pursuing the interests of the Australian Gas Alliance and the broader community. He is not yet the member for that area, but he has made a strong commitment to resolving this issue. A number of people who live in Jiliby Jiliby and the Dooralong and Yarralong valleys have told me that they are pleased about his commitment and his active pursuit to stop long wall coalmining in the area. This is a big issue, but there is a bigger issue with water.

Alan Hayes, accompanied by the honourable member for Lake Macquarie, will be meeting with me at 12.30 p.m. on Thursday. The plan is to ensure that the local area and the local community are protected from any negative consequences that may result from long-wall mining. During the Legislative Council's budget estimates committee hearing on Friday 1 September, I publicly opposed any mining proposal that would impact negatively on the region's precious water supply. In reply to a question, I said:

I give a commitment that, as to long wall mining in the Dooralong and Yarralong Valleys, I will not accept any proposal that will have a negative effect on the water catchment or the people of that area.

I am pleased to support the private member's statement of the honourable member for Lake Macquarie. As the Minister for the Central Coast, I will be working with the honourable member and other members from that area to ensure that water and its sustainability for the Central Coast are of paramount concern in the consideration of any issues relating to the local catchment. I again congratulate the honourable member on his interest in this area. We will be working together to ensure that we achieve the best outcome for the people of the Central Coast.