

**Tahmoor Colliery -
COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
Thursday 31st May 2007**

NEXT MEETING: THURSDAY 9TH AUGUST 2007

Meeting Open:	5:30pm	Meeting Closed:	8:30pm
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ATTENDANCE

✓	Attending	X	Apology / Didn't attend
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✓	Mrs. Margaret McDonald-Hill	Chairperson
✓	Cr. Colin Mitchell	Wollondilly Council Representative
✓	Mr. David Hunt	Community Representative
X	Mr. Mark Hardacre	Community Representative
✓	Mr. Steve Coulter	Community Representative
✓	Cr. Shane Read	Wollondilly Council Representative
✓	Mr David Clarkson	Tahmoor Colliery Representative
✓	Ms. Julie Sheppard	Community Representative
✓	Mr. Mitch Geddes	Tahmoor Colliery Representative
✓	Mr. Gavin Taylor	General Manager – Tahmoor Colliery
✓	Mr. Ben De Somer	Tahmoor Colliery Representative

Invitees:

✓	Mr. Darren Bullock	Mine Subsidence Board
X	Mrs Judith Egan	Dept Mineral Resources
✓	Mr. Greg Kinninmonth	Dept Mineral Resources
✓	Mr Stephen Shoesmith	Tahmoor Colliery Representative

Visitors:

✓	David Auchterloine	Local Resident
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Copy to:

General Manager	Wollondilly Shire Council (for Councillors)
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GENERAL BUSINESS

Item	Issue	Action	Date
1.	<u>Welcome</u>		
2.	<u>Declaration of interests</u>		
	Margaret confirmed that she is engaged by Centennial as independent chair	NFA	
3.	<u>Introductions / Apologies</u>		
	Apologies from Judith Egan & Mark Hardacre. Margaret MacDonald Hill was delayed due to road closures resulting from an accident.	NFA	
4.	<u>Confirmation of previous meeting minutes</u>		
	Minutes confirmed by Mitch Geddes / Ben De Somer	NFA	
5.	<u>Business Arising</u>		
5.1	<u>(Agenda Item 4.2 of previous minutes).</u> Margaret raised David Hunts issue at a Combined Councils meeting. The meeting didn't support the suggestion.	NFA	
5.2	<u>The Independent Panel in to the Southern Coalfields</u> The panel will be accepting submissions from 5 June to 30 th July 2007. Advertisements will appear in local papers next week.	NFA	
6.	<u>Correspondence</u>		
IN	<i>Email of 29 May, 2007 sent to Margaret re letter 23 May 2007</i> received from David Hunt, signed by Col Mitchell, Shane Read, Steve Coulter, Mark Hardacre, David Hunt and Julie Sheppard regarding possible damage on the Bargo Gorge. (Letter Attached)	Gavin Taylor to respond to letter by mid June	
OUT	None	NA	
7.	<u>Update on Current & Future Mining Operations</u>		
7.1	<u>Longwall 24B Progress</u> Dave advised that the longwall has moved from the start position near the railway a distance of 1490m towards the northwest. The face position being currently approaching Brundah Rd, Thirlmere. Longwall 24B is anticipated to be completed around September 2007. The colliery is currently in compliance with all SMP related conditions. There have been some complaints regarding vibrations from mine workings and in particular regarding the small pillar shift received by the colliery. Dave C advised that other details were already distributed each week in the weekly updates to residents. <u>Discussion</u> There was no discussion regarding this issue	NA	

Item	Issue	Action	Date
7.2	<p><u>Longwall SMP Approval Update</u></p> <p>Studies on Heritage and Aquatic Ecology of the affected reach of Bargo River have been completed. Reports were handed out to members of the TCCCC.</p> <p>Need to complete and investigation of the Myrtle Creek Rail Culvert Inghams Turkey Processing Plant Management Plans before LW24A. The Natural Features Surface Safety and Serviceability Plan (SSSMP) is underway and a risk assessment was carried out with regard to potential impacts on the creeks, rivers, soils and ecology by longwalls 24A to 26. This risk assessment is currently being finalised with respect to cliff instability, landslide risk and aquatic ecology. This has involved collecting an estimate of persons travelling through the area of the Bargo River in which cliff or rock falls are possible.</p> <p><u>Discussion</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. David Hunt asked how the information on numbers was collected. David Clarkson replied that the information was collected from websites of interest groups, personal communication with walk leaders, calculation of consultant and colliery staff trips and an estimate of general public walkthroughs. David Hunt and Julie Sheppard contributed numbers from their experience that the colliery was unaware of. 2. Julie Sheppard asked if the members of the TCCCC would get copies of the final SSSMP). David Clarkson replied that they would. 3. David Hunt asked if the colliery had considered aesthetics in the assessment. David Clarkson replied that this had been done to a small degree but that the focus was on trying to quantify the risk where possible and aesthetics was too subjective to assess on behalf of others. 	NA	
7.3	<p><u>MSB Update</u></p> <p>For the current longwall district there has been a total of 134 claims received of which 14 are finished and 19 refused for various reasons. There are 100 pending completion with 10 currently under repair. There is currently an average of 2 to 3 claims a week coming in to the board.</p> <p><u>Discussion</u></p> <p>There was no discussion.</p>	NA	

Item	Issue	Action	Date
7.4 & 7.5	<p><u>Environment Report</u></p> <p>A presentation was given by Ben De Somer that covered the progress of the No. 2 Fan Installation Project and the Reject Emplacement Area rehabilitation.</p> <p><u>Discussion</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Col Mitchell asked some general questions about the rehabilitation and the current extent of the Reject Emplacement Area and in particular the treatment of the runoff. Ben replied that at current levels of fill the reject area will last 10years and the expected life of the mine is 25 years. Gavin Taylor stated that the fill levels will drop considerably in the next few months and that the colliery is investigating methods to reuse/recycle the reject material. 2. Dave Hunt asked what the compaction levels were in the reject mound. Ben stated that this varies with the material that comes out of the mine. Coal compacts and drains well, while shale and stone compact and drain differently. 3. Julie Sheppard suggested that seeds be collected from trees in the reject area before they are felled to provide the seed stock for revegetating the reject area. It was broadly agreed that this was a good idea. 	NA	
7.6	<p><u>Thirlmere Way Bridge Defect Repairs</u></p> <p>There has been a delay due to the difficulty of engineering a solution to the noisy plate over the expansion joint. The solution has now been found and the part are being galvanised. The cost is \$86,000 for the works. It is anticipated that the work will commence on the 12th of June 2007. Final arrangements are currently being made with Council staff so that the work can proceed.</p>	NA	
8.	<u>General Business</u>		
8.1	Nil		
9.	<u>New Business</u>		
9.1	Nil		
10.	<u>Community Reports</u>		
10.1	<p><u>Julie Sheppard</u></p> <p>Julie Sheppard presented a DVD about subsidence damage to the Upper Cataract.</p>		
10.2	<p><u>David Hunt</u></p> <p>Spoke to his letter as mentioned in 6 above and outlined the points in more detail. During this presentation Margaret MacDonald Hill made the comment that the comment about Centennial Coal not listening to the concerns of the TCCCC regarding the Bargo Gorge was unfair and was perhaps based on a misunderstanding of the SMP process discussion during the last meeting. Gavin Taylor expressed to all members of the committee that signed the letter, his disappointment and personal feelings of offence at some of the claims made in the letter. Dave Hunt stated that it was not intended to offend but to address the reality that the colliery was not going to reconsider its start position for</p>	Gavin Taylor to respond to the list of supplementary questions at the 9 August 2007 TCCCC	

Item	Issue	Action	Date
	<p>longwalls 24A to 26. Gavin responded that no decisions have been made or are able to be made because the Department of Primary Industries are still assessing the SMP application with respect to these starting positions. Dave Hunt asserted that BHP has followed Mine Subsidence Engineering Consultants (MSEC) advice and it has led to severe damage to the Cataract River. Gavin Taylor would not comment on BHP's operational decisions but reminded the TCCCC that MSEC never advised minimum distances from rivers, never advised that damage won't occur and are not the sole arbiter in the decision making process of mine layout. David Hunt reiterated his letter and stated that it was not intended to insult but was reality that any staff who remain in the area after managers retire have to bear the brunt of community anger when longwall damage occurs to the environment and the economy. Has the colliery given any thought to the long term economic impact on the shire if the Bargo is damaged and as a result tourism is impacted? Gavin Taylor responded that his decision making is based on getting the best return for his shareholders, many of whom live in Wollondilly. It would not be in the best interests of the shareholders if he makes decisions that leave the colliery exposed to events that can cause its closure or the truncation of the resources upon which it relies. The colliery has no interests in causing damage to the environment and has listened to the concerns of the committee. Its longwalls have been positioned end on to the gorge and are set further back from the river than any other longwalls in the southern coalfields. Further, the assertions made in the letter with respect to senior people making decisions and then leaving the area were factually incorrect. Almost all ex-managers and general managers still live in the area and are active members of the community.</p> <p>During the reading and discussion of the letter a series of questions were raised supplementary to the letter's contents (copy attached).</p>	meeting	
10.3	<p><u>Steve Coulter</u> Steve Coulter presented a detailed report on a community issue in regards to emotional effects on residents. Issues covering availability to information, responses in regards to emotional support from the MSB and Tahmoor Colliery, capacity of engineers and their experience and support to the community as members of the TCCCC.</p>	Steve to approach the residents to organise a meeting	
11. Next Meeting			
THURSDAY 9TH AUGUST 2007			

Recorded: David Clarkson 31st May 2007

Confirmed:

(Signature)

Chairperson - Tahmoor Colliery Community Consultative Committee

ATTACHMENT A

Letter from Dave Hunt on behalf of the TCCCC members

Tahmoor Colliery Community Consultative Committee

Contact: David Hunt
2/67 Menangle St
Picton 2571

23 May 2007
Mr Gavin Taylor
General Manager Operations-South
Centennial Coal

Dear Gavin

Re. Longwalls 24A and 25A

We understand from our last Consultative Committee meeting that longwalls 24A and 25A are planned to proceed from next August with no modification increasing the set back of the mine from Bargo Gorge.

We as community members of this committee are very disappointed that our representations and the findings of the independent consultant regarding damage to the gorge have been given no consideration in that decision.

Recent Damage by BHP's Mine to the Upper Cataract

In recent months longwall mining by BHP has resulted in unacceptable cracking in the valley of the Upper Cataract River where escaping gas and polluted sediments are entering the river through extensive cracking of the river bed. BHP had relied upon advice of their consultants, Mining Subsidence Engineering Consultants (MSEC), who specified a minimum distance for the mine to stop short of the river to ensure any possible damage would be of no consequence.

The same consultants MSEC have prepared Centennial's Mine Subsidence Plan and advised a minimum safe distance for the Tahmoor mine from the Bargo River Gorge area.

The Unique Bargo River Gorge

The gorge in this critical stretch of river is much deeper than the Upper Cataract or any other area proposed for mining. It has near vertical escarpments with large overhangs and extensive sections of flawless sandstone plates in the base of the valley. The Bargo River Gorge has been acknowledged as a unique area for many years, worthy of protection in a reserve or national park. It has only been prevented from receiving that protection by opposition from the Department of Mineral Resources. Three photos have been attached from the bend in the river adjacent to longwalls 24A and 25A where it is most likely damage will occur. At the top of the river bend, the point closest to the mine, there is a magnificent deep swimming pool more than 50 metres long with a major overhang in the escarpment above (see photo1). In this location your consultant, MSEC, predicts 150mm upsidence of the riverbed relative to the valley walls and 197mm closure of these walls.

Predicted Mining Damage

As with their advice to BHP, MSEC has acknowledged cracking and related damage may occur in the Bargo River but has played down its significance. The results in the Upper Cataract must now surely support the advice given by Pells Sullivan Meynink, the independent consultant employed by the TCCCC committee, who predicted cracking is almost certain to occur and have possible major consequences.

Mining induced cracking has been well documented on nearby leases. Typical consequences that can be expected are

- loss of river flows and pollution of remaining pools from escaping gas
- desiccation of river bed and banks with the loss of plant and aquatic life.
- A possible to likely consequence would be cracking of the large overhangs (shown on the 3 photos included with this letter) resulting in their collapse into the pools below.

Suggested Remediation Fanciful

The massive forces produced by longwall mining are predicted in Centennial's Subsidence Management Plan to cause significant movements in the gorge. It is obvious to an unbiased observer that the rigid and extensive sandstone environment of the Bargo Gorge could not withstand such forces without sustaining irreparable damage. It is fanciful to suggest that so-called "remediation" of damage to escarpments, rock beds or pools would be possible even if the extreme difficulties of access into the gorge for construction work were feasible and acceptable.

The Lower Cataract River provides adequate testament to this statement. Collapsed cliffs in the escarpment are obvious, gas is still escaping, flows are still lost and the river is severely degraded 10 years after completion of mining in that area.

Costs Not Addressed including Costs to Wollondilly Community

The cost of remediation and the requirement for procedures to ensure it is carried out, including contingencies should the company be sold or liquidated, have not even been addressed. Similarly the mining company has never addressed the cost to the community once the natural features of the gorge have been degraded. The economic value to the Blue Mountains townships of their National Park features would give a guide to the value of a Bargo River National Park – once the tourism potential has been developed with access into the gorge.

Tourism related economic returns to Wollondilly townships would continue for the foreseeable future. There is a quantifiable cost to the community if the most significant features of the gorge area are downgraded and particularly if escarpments are left in an unstable state.

It is clear if Centennial Coal accepts damage will occur as now appears unarguable, it should have explained how it values this future cost and how it proposes to recompense the Wollondilly Community for the future lost economic benefits.

Surely the company must see that there is no environmentally or economically responsible route to follow other than removing the possibility of damage.

Local Miners will bear Consequences of Community Criticism

It is relevant to the argument that the colliery has had a number of owners in recent years. With the resulting turnover of staff, or staff replacement for any other reason, the replaced management personnel almost invariably have moved away from the area. In other words those making the crucial decisions on proximity of mine to the Bargo River, will no longer be around when the implications of damage to the Gorge are fully understood.

It is of concern that it is the local miners who will face the brunt of any adverse criticism from decisions being made by management, particularly after management has moved on with change in ownership.

As members of their community there is every possibility that they will be left to justify the economic cost to the Wollondilly community from the damage sustained—**damage which in future years will be considered nothing less than environmental vandalism.**

Conclusion

With the increasing evidence of damage from longwall mining in nearby leases, community members of the TCCCC are unanimous in calling for protection of the Bargo Gorge. Merely increasing the buffer distance by a few metres as a compromise is not acceptable. It is essential that this distance is adequate to remove any possibility of cracking and related damage.

Signed by all Community Members of the Tahmoor Community Consultative Committee

Col Mitchell - Wollondilly Shire Councillor
Shane Read - Wollondilly Shire Councillor
Steve Coulter
Mark Hardacre
David Hunt
Julie Sheppard

ATTACHMENT B

Supplementary Questions to the Letter from Dave Hunt on behalf
of the TCCCC members

Reasons for 23rd May Letter

Damage and pollution caused by mining near the Upper Centennial River were much worse than BHP and their consultant MSEC had assured would occur. We want to make absolutely certain there is no doubt within management of Centennial and DMR how valuable and important are the Bargo Gorge features now most at risk from the future longwalls, and how similar damage would be totally unacceptable.

We note that Wollondilly has now become a separate State electorate and the new member, Phil Costa's maiden speech stressed the crucial importance and future of tourism to the shire. With that in mind we want to submit a number of questions to Centennial.

1. What contingencies, if any, has Centennial made if mining causes any damage or pollution within the Bargo Gorge area.
2. Has Centennial made any estimate of future revenue forgone to the community from a downgrading of the Bargo Gorge area from:
 - Damage to the gorge's unique features.
 - Pollution of river flows.
 - Loss of general amenity and tourism revenue if considered in perpetuity.

Has the estimate been arrived at by a hard-nosed consideration of values as would be required if pursued within a court process.

3. Has the figure been compared with the loss in coal revenues (measured in terms of bottom line profits) if the mine buffer was increased to say 750m from the gorge.
4. Has a cash reserve been considered by Centennial to cover such possible future costs or would the magnitude of a major payout be likely to bankrupt the company.