

**Submission to NSW Government
Independent Planning Commission
Mudgee Wednesday 7 November 2018
Re Bylong Coal Project D532-18
from
Rahamim Ecology Centre Bathurst NSW**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Commission. My name is Sister Patricia Powell from the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and PNG. I am representing Rahamim Ecology Centre in Bathurst – a centre which offers education about the planet and its functions and processes, the better to cooperate with these functions and processes in the ways we conduct human activity on the planet.

I would like to acknowledge the Wiradjuri people and pay my respects to their Elders past present and emerging and express my appreciation for their spiritual connection to the land and the way they cared for this continent, maintaining its capacity to support life for upwards of 60,000 years. I am not suggesting we embrace a traditional Aboriginal lifestyle, but adopt their principle of knowing how the landscape functions and creating human societies that respect and work with these processes.

Fellow Planetary Citizens: The issue of the Kepco Mine in the Bylong Valley is not just an issue for the people of the Valley. It is a planetary issue. We live at a wonderful moment in history. In our lifetime we have come to know that our family tree stretches back through 13.7 billion years. That's how long the universe we inhabit has been in the making. And the Planet we call home has been evolving for 5 billion years. For most of that time it got on quite well without human intervention or interference. Although there is evidence of life emerging on the planet some 4 billion years ago, our human species did not appear on the scene until about 7 million years ago.

This fragile Planet, Earth has evolved a life support system that, up until this time, has not been found anywhere else in the Milky Way Galaxy, much less the universe. It is just the right distance from the sun to sustain life. It has soil

that is capable of growing food fit for consumption and nourishment. It stores water in the most amazing cloud system suspended in the atmosphere. It clothes itself in forests that function as the lungs of the planet, absorbing carbon dioxide and generating oxygen that makes the atmosphere breathable. Its atmosphere protects life from the harmful radiation of the sun. It has a self-regulating feed-back system that maintains the Earth's temperature within a range that, up until now, has sustained life.

It has evolved a most extraordinary variety of plant and animal life from bacteria to bears. And everything on the planet is interconnected and interdependent, operating as an ecosystem of ecosystems with processes of give and take by all the creatures and elements that are part of the whole. Where these ecosystems get out of balance, the survival of life – including human life – is threatened.

All life forms – human and the rest – share the same atmosphere. There is only one atmosphere that circles the planet. It does not know national boundaries, much less the boundaries of the Kepco Mine in the Bylong Valley.

Proportionate to the planet, the atmosphere is as thin as the skin of an apple. We pulled ourselves back from the brink of permanently damaging the ozone layer of the atmosphere a few years ago, when we changed the way we made refrigerator motors. Now we have a problem with an excess of gases that cause a greenhouse effect, trapping heat in the atmosphere and warming the earth's oceans and surfaces. This phenomenon is caused primarily by human activity such as burning fossil fuels over the past 200 years.

When we didn't know, perhaps it didn't matter. But now we know, it is suicidal, insane and irresponsible to continue doing so. We are interfering with the regulatory system that the planet evolved to control the climatic conditions that we have adapted to, in developing recurring patterns and processes that have shaped our societies and agriculture. This adaptation happened over thousands of years. The changes that we are witnessing in climate are happening so quickly now, adaptation cannot be assured. The precautionary principle must surely apply here.

Our reality as earth dwellers is changing very rapidly. And our awareness or consciousness of what is really “real” is also changing, but not quickly enough. The most recent Report from the International Panel on Climate Change gives us twelve good years to make a difference. There is a sense in which this Conference and the efforts of Kepco to meet impact study requirements are a waste of precious time. The fossil fuel industry is in decline. The need to address the planet’s rising temperature is urgent. Yet we continue to live as if we are somehow disconnected from the rest of the planet’s life forms and life support systems, when in fact, we depend on them absolutely. We continue to live as if the planet’s resources are infinite, when in fact fossil fuels do have a used by date, and the societies we have built on these resources face the two-fold threat of an energy crisis and a climate crisis. For the past two hundred years, we believed that we had developed systems and processes that would lift all earth’s human inhabitants out of poverty. But the reality is our systems and processes are destroying the life support systems of the planet for all life.

We have developed a global economic order that falsely assumes the possibility of unlimited material development and demands consumption of more of the earth’s limited resources than we actually need. This creates inordinate amounts of waste products that poison our waters and seas, denude our soils and forests and interfere with our atmospheric conditions. With our capacity for reflective consciousness we claim to be the most intelligent species ever to have evolved on the planet. And we do have the intelligence to imagine a different reality, to respond effectively and relevantly to the reality that has overtaken us, and to take action now, at least to mitigate the consequences of our actions, even if we have left it too late to avoid them totally.

Of course, there are people and industries that have already made the shift and are adopting more environmentally friendly practices. But it’s as if the rest of us are sleepwalking – living in denial – lying to ourselves about our predicament or overwhelmed with paralysis in face of it. Up until last century, Darwin’s concept of natural selection adequately described the process of evolution. But now, with the human species having colonized the whole of the planet, including the habitats of plants and animals, and with the technology

we have created, future evolution for all species is in our hands. It is an awesome responsibility and it behoves us to make well informed decisions and choices, not just for our bioregion but for the whole of the planet.

Australia is not meeting its Paris emissions targets if Korea or China or India or Japan are burning our coal. It's the same atmosphere, the same climate patterns that are being affected. The people of Australia and Korea have the capacity to develop sources of energy other than coal, especially if coal and coal seam gas mines threaten food producing regions like the Bylong Valley, Nashdale near Orange, the Liverpool Plains near Gunnedah and the Hunter Valley, to say nothing of aquifers and climate as well. Driving up the Hunter Valley now is like driving across the surface of the Moon. It is hard to believe the landscape there could ever be returned to productive farmland, whatever the good intentions and restoration plans of the mining companies that have degraded it.

We welcome the Korean people to invest in renewable energy in Australia. Both Australians and Koreans are clever people. But we need our multinational industrialists and the governments who control our nations' resources to support the initiatives that would move our economies to more sustainable and safe industries. Of course people need jobs – of course we need energy sources. But the longer we keep putting off the shift to renewables, the greater the danger that we will descend into chaos, if not in our lifetime, then in the lifetime of our children and our grandchildren.

I sincerely feel for those people in the Bylong Valley who support the expansion of the mine in the hope of financial security and employment. But the hardship they experience now will be nothing to the suffering that ensues for future generations if we do not get this right. Thank you.

Sr Patricia Powell rsm
Rahamim Ecology Centre Bathurst