



Case Study

Camberwell

Farmer Wendy Bowman is one of the last remaining residents at Camberwell – and she refuses to leave.

The Ashton South East Open Cut project is a proposed new open cut coal mine near the village of Camberwell near Singleton. It would extend the existing Ashton mine site over the New England Highway and into grazing land on the banks of Glennies Creek – one of the Hunter River's most significant tributaries.

The importance of Glennies Creek for the health of the Hunter River, and in particular its importance for irrigation of the nearby Pokolbin and Broke-Fordwich wine regions, led the New South Wales Office of Water to initially oppose the new mine. However the Office suddenly and inexplicably reversed its opposition in 2012, which led to the mine being approved (despite opposition from the New South Wales Health Department).²⁵⁵

The village of Camberwell already has coal mining on three sides. If the South East Open Cut mine goes ahead, Camberwell will be surrounded by coal mines.

The bulk of the houses (87 per cent) in the village have been purchased by the mine owner, Chinese Government-owned Yancoal, in anticipation of the mine extension proceeding, leaving few original residents.

One local resident and farmer, however, refuses to sell – and the mine is not economically viable without the property.

Wendy Bowman has been a farmer in the region since 1957. She was forced off her previous farm, Ashton, by the Ravensworth South open cut coal mine when co-existence with constant dust and water pollution from the mine became untenable for Wendy and her dairy herd.

Her Droughtmaster cattle farm, Rosedale, is now in the sights of Yancoal, one of the world's biggest coal producers, as an extension to its Ashton mine. The existing mine is both open cut and underground and produces 5.2 million tonnes of coal each year.

The threat of losing another farm to an open cut mine has Mrs Bowman digging in. Despite being in her late 70s, and having been diagnosed with “dust in the lung”, she says she has no intention of uprooting herself to convenience an international mining corporation and will stay to defend the land and its agricultural and ecological values.

The mine is small, relative to others in the region, and will only operate for seven years.

“Why dig up and destroy all the creek flats that will feed people for hundreds of years?” she asks.

An economic assessment of the project found the cost benefit analysis (submitted by the mine owners to the planning approval process as part of an Environmental Assessment) overstated the value of the project to New South Wales by \$378 million, and to the world by \$460 million.²⁵⁶ There was no value assigned to ecological impacts and no consideration of health impacts.

The destruction of communities through property acquisition and attrition as people leave for a cleaner, quieter environment is one of mining's little acknowledged ‘social harms’.

This social and psychological disruption is a significant health impact, and one that is, according to public health physician Dr Craig Dalton, likely to have a “far greater impact than the current particulate levels”.²⁵⁷

Mrs Bowman's main concern now is not for her own health, but for that of children in the community. She cites many examples of children suffering chronic respiratory illnesses, so ill they are missing months of school each year, with many only improving when they leave the region for a holiday, where their health rapidly recovers.²⁵⁸

Wendy describes the impact of blasting from the nearby Ravensworth mine as “significant”, both from the noise and the dust it leaves behind, but says it's very difficult to get the mine to take responsibility for the impact. “You ring the compliance officer at the mine, and they ask ‘how do you know the dust is from this mine?’. It comes right after the blasting explosion, and yet they want you to collect samples and prove it came from their mine.”