

TITLE: Big risk for Liverpool Plains Residents

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Chinese mining company Shenhua has quite a battle on its hands.

It has loudly and proudly promised employment, investment, and royalties for the Gunnedah region, so long as its Watermark coal project goes ahead, but locals are beginning to publicly call “foul” on Shenhua’s claims, and they’re being just as noisy.

Liverpool Plains residents have managed to stuff the NSW government’s letterbox full of appeals against the mine. Their submissions make for alarming reading.

Locals tell of concerns over noise and sleep disruption from the mine’s proposed 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week, digging and drilling.

There are fears that the harmful dust from the open cut-mine and coal transportation could fall into household rainwater tanks relied on for drinking and bathing.

Local farmers sent in letters from organic agricultural buyers, who wrote that they would not purchase produce from a farm next door to an enormous coalmine.

There have also been instances of banks refusing to evaluate properties in the region because values are expected to fall once the mine is operational.

The results are in.

More than 80 per cent of the submissions urge the NSW government not to approve the mine.

Shenhua project manager Paul Jackson recently boasted that his mine's application is "bulletproof". There are plenty of people lining up to take a shot anyway and they have plenty of ammunition.

The project is a greenfield, meaning it's entirely new and not built on any existing operations. These sorts of projects are naturally prone to significant uncertainty.

Everything the mining company says will happen is just an assumption until operations commence.

The project risks damaging the aquifer relied on by farmers in a wide area. One mistake could be catastrophic to the region's valuable agricultural industry.

The Liverpool Plains submissions outline very fair concerns of negative impacts. The concerns of residents are valid – it's not enough for Shenhua to dismiss those concerns with a wink and a smile.

The reality is that this is an exercise in balancing risk and return. The risk for these concerned residents and their future is too big.

Locals know that if the Watermark coal project is approved by the NSW government, it will threaten one of the most productive tracts of agricultural land in the country.

Shenhua know that too. That's why they wanted their application to be bulletproof.

Barry O'Farrell, all eyes are on you.

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