

DUNMORE LAKES SAND MINING

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama—Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services) (23:19:04): In August of last year I stood in this House to express my opposition to a proposal for the Dunmore Lakes sand mine expansion that threatened one of the most beautiful features of my electorate, the Minnamurra River. Today I put on record my complete and utter disgust at the decision by the Independent Planning Commission to approve the expansion of this mine. On Monday the commission approved the application by Dunmore Sand and Soil to modify its existing development consent to extract around 1.3 million tonnes of sand from two new pits over three years.

In my inaugural speech in this place I talked about how important preserving and protecting our local environment is for me and my community. Since becoming the local MP, I have been strident in standing up for our community on such important matters as opposing coal seam gas in water catchments and protecting prime agricultural land. I have also spoken out against the overdevelopment and overcrowding of our precious and special villages. Last August I voiced my serious concerns that the sand mine proposal sought a modification to an existing application more than a kilometre away from the originally approved mine, which will extract an additional 300 million tonnes of sand with the potential to impact coastal wetlands, endangered ecological communities like the Bangalay Sand Forest and have a potentially devastating effect on tourism and the scenic beauty that our region is renowned for.

I have already advanced the view that this application was not a modification to an existing consent, and I see no need to revisit this argument. However, in its decision on Monday, the commission stated, "On balance the impacts associated with the application are acceptable and in the public interest." Having listened carefully to the voices of locals, I can assure the House that this proposal is not in the public interest and does not enjoy community support. I have been contacted by literally thousands of people from across our region who have expressed their unequivocal objection to this proposal. In fact, last year almost 5,000 locals signed a petition opposing the development with hundreds flocking to James Oates Reserve at the Minnamurra headland to raise concerns about ground erosion and the siltation of local waterways.

The commission said, on page 17 of its findings, that it carefully considered the views of the community through public submissions and comments received through public consultation. But when the public is so firm in its opposition to this application, how can the commission seriously say that it has considered the views of the community who are opposed to this application and then approve it? I do not know who the commission was talking to, but it was not talking to locals. Our natural beauty should not be unnecessarily put at risk for "economic and social benefits through the continued development of the site".

The decision from the commission acknowledges that there are predicted impacts on water quality, groundwater, flooding, coastal wetlands and flora and fauna. These things are simply too important to risk. I appreciate that the commission has consulted with both Kiama and Shellharbour councils, residents and the wider community, but I feel that this proposal has not been given the

rigorous attention and critique that it requires. I have always placed on record my concerns with stage 5A covering flood-prone areas and stage 5B concerning the Minnamurra River. An environmental assessment shows that stage 5A covers flood-prone land, including Rocklow Creek. Stage 5B covers the Minnamurra River.

Our community holds concerns that an extractive industry of this intrusive nature will impact on the delicate backdrop and would result in ground surface erosion and in siltation of local waterways. Indeed, locals will tell you that the area covered by stage 5B is very low lying, which could have deleterious impacts on groundwater resources and surface water with significant impacts on adjacent wetlands. Those risks are simply too great to satisfy a mining company's needs. I join with my community in being absolutely appalled by the decision of the Independent Planning Commission to grant the Boral and Dunmore Sand and Soil extraction project an expansion which will certainly not satisfy locals' views. I want the people of Minnamurra and Kiama to know that I will always oppose this project and, whilst I respect the independent processes, I do not agree with this decision.