

Community Consultative Committee Details

CCC / Project Name:	Austar Coal Mine	Reporting Period:	January - December 2022
Independent Chairperson:	Margaret MacDonald-Hill	Proponent Contact:	Carly McCormack

1. Executive Summary

The Austar Community Consultative Committee was established in 2006 as part of a modification to the existing 1996 consent approval DA29/95 by the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning. The Committee operates in accordance with the 2019 Department of Planning and Environment's Community Consultative Committee Guidelines for State Significant Projects.

The Austar Coal Mine is an underground coal mine situated in the Cessnock Council Local Government area, approximately ten kilometres south west of the town of Cessnock and in proximity to the villages of Paxton, Ellalong and Pelton in the Lower Hunter Valley of NSW. The Austar Coal Mine incorporates the former Pelton, Ellalong, Cessnock No. 1 (Kalingo) and Bellbird South Collieries and includes coal extraction, handling, processing and rail and road transport facilities. Extensive mining has been undertaken within the Austar Coal Mine since 1916. Historical mining was predominantly via bord and pillar mining and more recently via conventional longwall mining and Longwall Top Coal Caving (LTCC) methods. Following the placement of the mine on care and maintenance at the end of March 2020, Yancoal Management announced the closure of the mine in February 2021. This announcement was received with mixed emotions as mining operations at the site had been ongoing since 1916.

The committee comprises:

- four local community representatives;
- one elected Cessnock City Council representative;
- one representative from the Cessnock Police Local Area Command;
- two Austar Coal Mine representatives, with attendance from other personnel as required;
- one independent Chairperson.

There have been no changes to the composition of the committee, with the exception of Cessnock City Council's elected representative following the Local Government elections in late 2021. Members are long term with a vast knowledge of the mine's operations and a good rapport with Austar personnel.

As mining has now ceased and moving towards permanent closure, the committee meets twice a year. Both meetings resumed normal face-to-face proceedings, in observance of all health requirements and were well attended. Austar personnel continue to provide comprehensive PowerPoint presentations at each meeting on the mine's operations and activities.

The focus of the committee throughout 2022 remained on the decommissioning and mine closure. At the March meeting, the members were interested in the security on site with a reduced workforce and the employment opportunities available to the current staff such as relocating to another Yancoal operation or redundancy, or continuing on site until no longer required. A lot has been achieved with approximately 75% of equipment underground recovered, transferred to other sites, or stored for sale or scrap. A general site clean-up has taken place with temporary mine sealing scheduled for completion mid 2022 to reduce risk and maximise public safety. The Reverse Osmosis plant has been decommissioned and all non-heritage redundant mine infrastructure will be demolished.

At the September meeting the committee was informed of the flooding of the mine workings, further studies and review of site investigations, risk assessment, preparation for permanent mine sealing, stakeholder engagement, technical assessments updates, development of a scope of works to meet closure goals and objectives to achieve safe, stable landforms with a beneficial land use, to meet all regulatory requirements. The number of employees remaining on site, security measures and trespassing were also discussed, along with the role of Subsidence Advisory NSW in historic mines, future of historic mine structures and heritage items on site and the railway. After two years of excess rain, bushfire management was also mentioned.

As in previous years, no complaints were received for the reporting period.

Other topics of discussion also included but not limited to:

- general environmental management and monitoring, including air quality, noise, surface water and groundwater, subsidence and vibration monitoring
- current activities; land and bushfire management, rehabilitation activities, review of environmental management strategy and management plans
- environmental incidents including water discharges caused by rainfall events
- community complaints
- community sponsorship and donations
- mine closure planning activities and timetable; field investigations and risk assessment and stakeholder consultation
- rehabilitation reforms.

2. CCC activities over last 12 months

- Committee meetings were held in the months of March and September 2022.
- Attendance at meetings is consistent, as the committee sets its meeting dates at the end of each calendar year for the ensuing year to avoid any known potential conflicts.
- No site tours were undertaken during the period because of Covid-19 restrictions.
- No joint CCC meetings were held during the period.

3. Key issues

The key issue for the committee during this period and over the next few years will be mine closure planning. The committee is aware this will be a long and complex process and remains supportive of the Austar mine and personnel.

Issue	Actions Taken	Next Steps
What does mine closure mean	Austar have provided comprehensive information on the planning process, timing, studies and expectations to the March and September meetings.	Ongoing.
Future land use and what remains	Studies undertaken and discussed at committee meetings.	Ongoing.


4. Focus for next 12 months

The planned activities for 2023 will continue to be guided by the contributions of the CCC members. These activities are likely to include:

- mine closure
- Rehabilitation.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no outstanding or emerging issues that have not been addressed or are in the process of being so, to the committee's satisfaction.

Committee Meeting minutes and presentations are available on the website within two weeks of each meeting.

Signature of Chair:	
Date:	March 8 2023