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HD **Going Nowhere**
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Warrumbungle Shire Council (WSC) is warning Dubbo that it might not get a brass razoo for public projects out of the Cobbora **Coal** Project, should it ever be developed.

WSC is refusing to sign a voluntary planning agreement (VPA) with the project's proponent, NSW-owned Cobbora Holding **Company** (CHC), for reasons including the use of the "worker domicile model" to determine how much money it gets annually across the projected 21-year life of the proposed mine.

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The project's environmental impact statement indicates that 60 per cent of the proposed mine's operational staff would live in the Dubbo Local Government Area (LGA), 15 per cent in Warrumbungle, 15 per cent in Wellington and 10 per cent in Mid-Western LGAs.

CHC has already entered into VPAs with Dubbo, Wellington and Mid-Western councils.

During a break from a tense meeting in Dunedoo yesterday, WSC general manager Steve Loane rejected out of hand the figures, given the uncertain future of the project.

"CHC is not going to be the miner," he said.

"They're just the developer looking to get the approval through. So when they on-sell it, it could be to an overseas **company**. Let's say for argument's sake a **Chinese company** that might choose to fly in every single one of their workers. Therefore no council will get any of the money."

Mr Loane addressed about 110 people at yesterday's meeting called by the NSW Planning Assessment Commission to gather feedback on the NSW Department and Infrastructure's assessment of the project, recommending approval subject to conditions.

WSC held talks with commissioners Paul Forward and David Johnson the day before.

The general manager told of a council resolution calling for VPA negotiations based on the "approved resource that's in the ground, which is what they do in Muswellbrook".

WSC is also asking the commission to make a condition of the project's approval the conducting of a study into the socio-economic impact on Dunedoo and district of the **purchase** of 48,500 hectares of land for the mine site, leading to the departure of up to 90 people.

Adviser to WSC on the project, Warwick Giblin spoke of disappointment that information provided to CHC had not previously prompted a detailed study to produce "objective hard data upon which the quantum for the VPA would be determined moving forward".

Mr Giblin said achieving "socio-economic justice" for Dunedoo and district was the "nub of the issue for council".

He said the mine would not appear "overnight" to fill the void in economic activity, in fact it "may never be built".

"So what are we left with? We're left with this community carrying costs which need to be recognised and funded," the adviser said.

Opinion was divided at the meeting as to whether the state government would be able to sell or lease the project, or if it should go ahead.

Among 41 registered speakers were environmentalists who suggested that its low-grade **coal** would not be required in a matter of years as clean **energy** initiatives gained favour.

WSC deputy mayor and Dunedoo resident Murray Coe said it had reached the stage where for the sake of the town "it must go forward".

Mr Loane said: "It will certainly be approved but I don't know if it will be developed".

He said WSC wanted a VPA that came into force from "day one of the approval" of the project.

The general manager pointed to the precedent set by the VPA between CHC and Wellington Council allowing for \$4.8 **million** to be spent on the state-owned Cobbora Road from Wellington to the Golden Highway immediately upon approval of the proposed mine.

WSC has been offered \$2.7 **million** by CHC for public projects but wants \$5 **million** which Mr Loane calls "chicken feed".

"It is important to understand that we're not just whingeing because we didn't get enough money," he said.

"This is about **equity** for the community and certainty."

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