



UPPER HUNTER MINING DIALOGUE

2024 COMMUNITY FORUM

REPORT

29 October 2024

Singleton Civic Centre, Singleton NSW

The Upper Hunter Mining Dialogue would like to thank everyone who participated in the 2024 Community Forum and the members who attended Dialogue meetings throughout the year. The Dialogue could not exist and achieve the results it has without the contributions from members in particular community members. We thank you for your continued involvement and engagement.

The 2024 Community Forum

Since 2012, the Upper Hunter Mining Dialogue has held a Community Forum to create an opportunity for stakeholders to come together and hear about the Dialogue's key projects, learn more about industry and government policies and projects, as well as voice their views on the impacts of mining in the Upper Hunter region. The Forum is now held on a biennial basis.

On Tuesday 29 October 2024, over 120 community members, industry employees and government representatives attended the 2024 Community Forum at the Singleton Civic Centre.

The Community Forum focused on key themes of the regional economic outlook, the future of the local mining industry, post-mining land use and critical environmental impacts such as water stewardship, air quality and rehabilitation progress.

A key aspect of the Community Forum is to ensure that the Dialogue continues to evolve and meet community expectations. Based on Survey feedback, 85% of attendees thought that the Forum addressed the key issues facing the Hunter, and 95% of attendees found the Forum a valuable experience. The learnings and feedback from the Forum will help shape the Dialogue's work plan for 2025 and 2026 and provide the necessary direction for the Dialogue's priorities and projects.

This report recaps the presentations from the Community Forum and summarises the key themes and issues which were identified in the discussion and feedback session. Some of these issues which are outlined in this report may be outside the remit for the Dialogue to lead. The next steps and actions for the Dialogue to address the feedback from the Forum will be developed with the Dialogue Working Groups in early 2025, and form the basis of the 2025-2026 Work Plan.



Forum Program

Time	Topic	Presenter
8:30 am	Forum Opens - Breakfast and Coffee Provided (Civic Centre Foyer)	
	MORNING SESSION 1	
9:00 am	Welcome to Country	Uncle Warren Taggart, Walkabout with Warren
9:05 am	Introduction to 2024 Community Forum	Jessica Rouse, Forum Facilitator
9:15 am	Chair Address	John Watson, UHMD Chair
9:25 am	Update on Annual Projects and Priorities	James Barben, UHMD Secretariat
9:40 am	Air Quality 2024 Progress Update	Russ Francis, Zephyr Environmental
10:00 am	Upper Hunter Economic Outlook (includes Q&A)	Robin Griffin, Wood Mackenzie
10:30 am	Morning Tea Break - Pastries and Coffee Provided (Civic Centre Foyer)	
	MORNING SESSION 2	
11:00 am	NSW Government Update	The Hon. Emily Suvaal MLC, Member of the Legislative Council
11:20 am	Climate Change Policy & Action Plan - Impacts for Hunter	Shagofta Ali, NSW Environment Protection Authority
11:40 am	Update from Mt. Arthur Coal's Pathway to 2030	Liz Watts, BHP - NSW Energy Coal
12:00 pm	Q&A with Session 2 Presenters	Facilitated by Jessica Rouse
12:20 pm	Lunch Break - Lunch and Refreshments Provided (Civic Centre Foyer)	
	AFTERNOON SESSION	
1:00 pm	Planning for Transition - Insights from other regional examples	Roberta Ryan, Institute for Regional Futures
1:20 pm	Feedback Session	Small tables
3:00 pm	Closing Remarks and Forum Close - Thank you all for attending!	

Summary of presentations

Presentations from the speakers can be found on the Forum website here:

<https://miningdialogue.com.au/engagement/2024-community-forum>.

The 2024 Community Forum was facilitated by Jessica Rouse, journalist from @ The Coal Face. The day commenced with Wonnarua Elder, Uncle Warren Taggart from Walkabout with Warren welcoming all attendees to Wonnarua country.

Chairs Address

John Watson, the Dialogue Chair welcomed all attendees and reflected on the importance of the Dialogue in providing factual and transparent information about the mining industry in the Upper Hunter, as well as creating a space for open and respectful conversations about issues that are

important to both the community, industry and wider stakeholders. Mr Watson commenced his role as the Dialogue Chair in 2023, but has been an engaged member of the Dialogue for many years.

Mr Watson acknowledged that since the last Community Forum there had been major changes for the region including political representation at both state and local levels, economic and infrastructure changes, weather conditions, as well as changes to industry with major site closures and new operations commencing. Mr Watson also provided an outline of the governance structure of the Dialogue including the working groups priorities and focus areas.

Lastly, Mr Watson acknowledged everyone affected by the Hunter Valley bus crash, and recognised contributions from past members of the Dialogue including, the late Wendy Bowman who was a passionate and highly valued member of the Dialogue. Mr Watson also acknowledged Jeff Esdaile for his contributions to the Joint Environment Working Group, Danny Eather who has stepped down as president of Business Singleton and Sarah Withell the previous Dialogue Chair for her significant contributions and leadership to the Dialogue.



Update on Dialogue Projects and Priorities

James Barben, from the Dialogue Secretariat, provided a comprehensive update on the Dialogue's key projects and activities since the previous Forum. Mr Barben spoke briefly on the current strategies and plans for the future of the Hunter Valley involving various organisations, including state and local governments and various non-government organisations, and the need for a coordinated plan for action.

Mr Barben outlined the key achievements of the Dialogue in the past two years including:

- Pasture Restoration Field Day held in October 2023. The Field day brought together 40 stakeholders from 18 organisations and the community. The tour visited Liddell and Rix's Creek mines to further understand rehabilitation that had been returned to pasture, and the successes and challenges in rehabilitation of mining land.
- Increased engagement with young people, in particular through consultations with local young people in 2023-2024 and the School Mine Tours Program which saw over 570 students visiting mine sites in 2024.

- Strengthened engagement with the local business community, including maintaining the Procurement Information Hub.
- Increased community engagement with greater representation by the Dialogue on community networks, with two newsletters published annually, attendance at local events as well as increased community membership in the Dialogue Working Groups.
- Publication of the annual water accounting framework which showed slightly lower than average rainfall in 2023, and mining using just 2.7% of the water that entered the Hunter River System. For complete analysis and results visit: <https://miningdialogue.com.au/featured/wateruse>).
- Publication of the annual rehabilitation principles framework, which showed 962 hectares of land was newly rehabilitated in 2023, and approximately 1,600 hectares was disturbed due to new mine site construction. For complete analysis and results visit: <https://miningdialogue.com.au/featured/rehabilitation-reporting>
- Annual air quality monitoring reporting which showed a negative correlation between rainfall and particulate matter. For complete analysis and results visit: <https://miningdialogue.com.au/featured/air-quality-analysis>

2024 Air Quality Update

Russ Francis, Zephyr Environmental presented a progress update for 2024 air quality in the Upper Hunter. Russ gave a brief introduction to air quality monitoring and key pollutants and their sources. Mr Francis outlined that the 2024 results to date (noting that the year has not finished) are likely to be very similar to 2023. The results suggest that the PM₁₀ concentrations in the Upper Hunter are consistent with air quality from across NSW. Results also indicate that there is a negative correlation between rainfall and particulate matter concentrations, and that fluctuations in particulate matter concentrations are mainly related to meteorological conditions (temperature and rainfall) rather than coal production variations.

Economic Outlook for the Hunter Region

Robin Griffin, from Wood Mackenzie presented the economic forecast for the Upper Hunter. Mr Griffin outlined current trends for coal production globally and future demand for Upper Hunter coal, based on policy drivers such as energy transition and emissions targets. A longer term view was outlined which included export opportunities for Upper Hunter coal. Mr Griffin caveated the findings with several key uncertainties such as trade opportunities, investor appetite and policies for emissions reduction.

NSW Government Update

The Hon. Emily Suvaal MLC provided an update from the NSW Government including the work that has been undertaken through the inquiry into *Beneficial and productive post-mining land use review*. Ms Suvaal discussed her views on the future of the Upper Hunter



including challenges and opportunities and addressed the strategic role the Hunter region has in transitioning industries. The role of the Future Jobs and Investment Authority was also discussed as an opportunity for a centralised entity to support the region going forward.

EPA’s Climate Change Policy

Shagofta Ali, Environment Protection Agency, provided an overview of the NSW Climate Change Policy with a focus on the impacts and implications for the region. Recent survey results highlighted the need for additional support for the mining industry in adopting emissions reduction measures and support to decarbonise. Ms Ali also provided an update on the best practice guide for greenhouse gas mitigation at NSW coal mines which is underdevelopment and intended for public consultation in early 2025.

BHPs Pathway to 2030 for Mt Arthur

Liz Watts, BHP, then provided a mining industry perspective on the closure plans for Mt Arthur coal. Ms Watts outlined the pathway for closure of the site by 2030 including options being considered for post mining land use such as energy production (pumped hydro and solar), manufacturing, recreation and agriculture. Ms Watts also addressed the role of the community in closure planning with key concerns raised by the community being economic uncertainty and environmental and visual impact concerns.

Q&A Session

A question and answer session was held with the Hon. Emily Suvaal, Shagofta Ali and community representative Di Sneddon. Questions from the audience focused on transition planning and the role of the government, economic diversification and environmental policy setting.





Feedback and workshop session: Planning for transition

Roberta Ryan from the Institute for Regional Futures led the last session of the day which was an interactive workshop where attendees were asked to identify and prioritise the major issues they see for the region.

A separate report from the Institute for Regional Futures is being prepared which provides a comprehensive review of the key themes and projects which were identified during the session.

It was clear that the dominant theme of the session was post mining land use, both the regulatory framework for post mining land use as well as the future land use opportunities created including economic stimulus, employment and design.



Most of the other feedback and issues raised could be categorised into socioeconomic and environmental issues. More detail of the specific issues for these categories will be included in the report from the Institute for Regional Futures.

ECONOMIC & SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES
Economic transition and employment	Post mining land use
Planning and governance	Air quality in the Upper Hunter
Collaborative planning and social cohesion	Climate risk and emissions
Infrastructure and public places	Rehabilitation
Healthcare and social services	Water stewardship and security

Overall, the key recommendations identified from the workshop session included:

- The continuation of the environmental programs that address ongoing impacts of mining, including rehabilitation, water security and air quality monitoring.
- An expansion of co-designed, community-driven programs focused on skills and workforce development.
- Enhancing government and industry collaboration to ensure aligned approaches.
- Continued open, transparent communication to address community concerns, cumulative impacts, and landowner rights.
- Building local capacity to support informed, engaged communities ready to navigate socio-economic transitions.

Next Steps

The Workshop Report from the Institute for Regional Futures will be finalised and released in early 2025. The feedback will inform the future direction for the Dialogue including the development of projects and priorities for the 2025 and 2026 Work Plan.