

Austar Community Consultative Committee (CCC) – 2023 Annual Report

CCC project name:	Austar Coal Mine	Reporting period:	January 1 to December 31 2023
Independent chairperson:	Margaret MacDonald-Hill	Proponent contact:	Carly McCormack

1. Executive summary / introduction

The Austar Community Consultative Committee was established in 2006 as part of a modification to the 1996 Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning's approval of the underground coal mine. The mine is situated in the Lower Hunter Valley within the Cessnock City Council Local Government Area, approximately ten kilometres south west of the town of Cessnock and in proximity to the local villages of Paxton, Ellalong and Pelton. Coal mining has taken place since 1916 and the Austar mine incorporates the former Pelton, Ellalong, Cessnock No. 1 (Kalingo) and Bellbird South Collieries. Early mining was predominantly bord and pillar and later moved to Longwall Top Coal Caving. The mine was placed on care and maintenance in March 2020 and Yancoal subsequently announced its permanent closure in February 2021. Since then the Committee's main focus has been on rehabilitation and mine closure and the meeting schedule subsequently reduced to bi-annual meetings.

The committee is comprised of:

- Four local community representatives;
- One elected Cessnock City Councillor representative;
- A representative from the Hunter Police District, Cessnock Police;
- Three Austar Coal Mine representatives with attendance from other personnel as required;
- An independent Chairperson.

2. CCC activities over last 12 months:

- The committee met in March and September for the reporting year. Meeting topics such as technical studies, audits, decommissioning updates and stakeholder engagement required for mine closure are included, along with potential future land use options and regular reporting on environmental monitoring, compliance, complaints and bushfire management. The revised DPE CCC guidelines were also discussed and the committee have signed the revised Code of Conduct and Declarations of Interest documents and agreed on a Terms of Reference as required by the Department.
- Meetings are held on site but no formal inspections were undertaken during 2023.
- Committee members take on additional activities in the assessment of applications for the Austar Community Support program outside the normal meeting schedule.
- As stated in previous reporting, most of the members are long term and have a vast knowledge of the mine's operations and enjoy a good rapport with Austar personnel.

- Another year without any community complaints, indicative that Austar's engagement practises within the community and the committee itself are both effective and well established.

3. Key issues

As the mine moves towards permanent closure and all that entails, this will remain the key issue for the committee. Therefore the issues remain consistent with those of previous years.

Issue	Actions taken	Next steps
Complexities of mine closure	Closure status reported at each meeting, including early works, stakeholder engagement, milestones achieved and technical studies progress.	Closure management areas and progress updates reported to each meeting.
Future land use and other opportunities	Assessment of concept studies including Green Gravity energy storage potential.	Specialist assessments and ongoing reporting to committee meeting.

4. Focus for next 12 months:

- Continued comprehensive and planned activities will be guided by the above.
- Currently, there are no known outstanding or emerging issues. However, it is reasonable to expect these will be addressed when and as they occur.

Name of chairperson:	Margaret MacDonald-Hill
Date:	February 19 2024.