

Austar Community Consultative Committee (CCC) – 2024 Annual Report

CCC project name:	Austar Coal Mine	Reporting period:	January 1 to December 31 2024
Independent chairperson:	Margaret MacDonald-Hill	Proponent contact:	Carly McCormack

1. Executive summary / introduction

The Austar Coal Mine 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.

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 November for the reporting year with the usual reporting on environmental monitoring, compliance, complaints, outcomes from the triennial Independent Environmental Audit, technical studies for mine closure, including decommissioning updates, stakeholder engagement, Yancoal community support programs and potential future land use options. As the postmining plan currently is to return the site to grass and forest, controlled burns and bushfire management are of interest to the members.
- As part of surface decommissioning operations, the committee was briefed on the serious incident which occurred in September involving a contractor. Due to ongoing investigations further details were not available at the time of the meeting. The historic boreholes rehabilitation project, the decommissioning and removal of the Kalingo Dam, the preservation of heritage items and community interest in retention of the railway line and the relocation of the memorial at the pit top to the coal handling preparation plant to allow continued public access were all discussed.

- Meetings are held on site but no formal inspections were undertaken during 2024.
- The currency of the committee's Terms of Reference was confirmed at the November meeting with a reduction in the meeting schedule to annually.
- As stated in previous reporting, most of the members are long term, well respected and have a vast knowledge of the mine's history and enjoy a good rapport with Austar personnel. When required members assist in the assessment of applications for the Austar Community Support program outside the normal meeting schedule.

3. Key issues

As the mine moves towards permanent closure, this will remain the key issue for the committee.

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 land potential.	Specialist assessments and ongoing reporting to committee meetings.

4. Focus for next 12 months:

- Continued comprehensive and planned activities will be guided by the above.

Name of chairperson:	Margaret MacDonald-Hill
Date:	March 5 2025.