

Press release:

Embargo until 8.45 am Monday 13th June 2022

Extinction Rebellion says “NO to new UK coal”

XR Protestors from around the country have gathered with XR Cumbria outside the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) this morning to tell Michael Gove to say no to a new deep coal mine in Whitehaven, Cumbria.

This mine is planned to produce 2.8 million tonnes of metallurgical coal a year that, using the government’s own conversion factors {1}, would emit 9 million tonnes of CO₂ per year when used in blast furnaces to make steel. If approved, coal extraction would be permitted until December 2049.

Mr Gove is expected to announce a decision before 7th July, having received in March the recommendations of the Planning Inspector who presided over the Public Inquiry {2}.

“The dire impacts of climate change are already being felt around the world, yet carbon emissions are still rising, and there appears to be no credible system to stop new fossil fuel extraction” said Maggie Mason from XR Bristol. “Approving this coal mine in the final months of the UK presidency of COP26 would be a real blow to Alok Sharma’s attempts to phase out coal, and would give a green light to more new extraction elsewhere.” {3}.

Lord Deben, Chair of the UK Committee on Climate Change wrote to Gove’s predecessor Robert Jenrick in January 2021 {4}, urging him “to consider further the UK’s policy towards all new coal developments” and pointing out that “coking coal use in steelmaking could be displaced completely by 2035” which would leave no domestic use for the Cumbrian coal.

Indeed, several UK steel industry leaders have spoken out in recent months to say that they do not need this new UK coal mine {5}. Their priority is decarbonisation of their steel plants, and attracting government help to meet competition from European steel makers who are moving swiftly towards “green steel” and the green hydrogen revolution.

Carbon emissions are not the only issue with the proposed development. The mine is situated on a heavily contaminated industrial site, and coal below the bed of the Irish Sea would be accessed via sloping “drifts” from an old mine. The proposal has been amended several times to try to reduce environmental risks, but vital site investigations of the complex and hazardous operations have not been started. Opponents of the mine say that these operations, such as drilling under ancient woodland, may not be safe or viable.

“Cumbria needs new green jobs that will enable our young people to stay and build a future,” said Ali Ross from Extinction Rebellion Cumbria, “not a step backward into coal mining that will escalate the climate and ecological emergency.” {6}

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Notes for the editor

{1} Business Energy and industrial Strategy (BEIS)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2021>

{2} Michael Gove, as Secretary of State of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is the decision maker following the Public Inquiry into the application by West Cumbria Mining (held Tuesday 7 September to Friday 1 October 2022). Cumbria County Council had previously approved the application in October 2020. West Cumbria Mining was opposed at the Inquiry by South Lakes Action on Climate Change (SLACC) and Friends of the Earth (FOE). The Planning Inspector, Mr Stephen Normington, submitted his report to Mr Gove on the 7th of April 2022, but Mr Gove is not obliged to follow his recommendations.

{3} Guardian article 27 May 2021: Professor Rebecca Willis, Lancaster University

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/27/dig-coal-to-save-the-climate-the-folly-of-cumbrias-plans-for-a-new-coalmine>

{4} 29 January 2021 Letter from Lord Deben, Chair of the UK Climate Change Committee to Gove's predecessor Robert Jenrick (SoS MHCLG)

[https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/letter-deep-coal-mining-in-the-uk/.](https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/letter-deep-coal-mining-in-the-uk/)

He states that the mine would *"increase global emissions and have an appreciable impact on the UK's legally binding carbon budgets"* and that Jenrick's decision not to call in the Local Planning Authority's decision to grant planning permission to the mine to 2049 *"gives a negative impression of the UK's climate priorities in the year of COP26"*. He also referenced the 6th Carbon Budget pathways for UK steelmaking.

{5} Two media articles.

Guardian 1 May 2022

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/may/01/steel-boss-dismisses-claim-that-sector-needs-new-cumbrian-coalmine>

Channel 4 20 May 2022 "British steel industry leaders do not require coal from proposed Cumbria mine". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7mUfX_RtiY

{6} Guardian 16 May 2022

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/16/cumbria-coalmine-redundant-before-it-even-opens-say-campaigners>

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