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Decision on Drayton South Project Shows Balance

The decision of the Planning Assessment Commission on 17 October to refuse the Drayton South Coal Project is some welcome balance after many years of largely rubber stamp approvals for coalmines.

Speakers for the coal industry want to focus all attention on the jobs lost to miners but they are careful never to mention the fickle nature of that employment. Likewise, in talking up the benefits of their industry to local communities and to state revenue they ignore how fleeting those benefits are and how tiny they are compared to the massive profits the miners take off shore.

You would need to look very carefully indeed to find a mining project that was not recommended by the Department of Planning and Environment but this project was refused despite their recommendation. We can only trust that the agency will learn from this that their unbalanced support for one business sector over all others is not acceptable.

The decision refutes the frequent coal industry assertions that mines do not harm other industries and that the jobs that they provide must somehow take precedence over the jobs that they displace from other industries.

The PAC found that the economic benefits claimed by the proponent Anglo American were greatly exaggerated. This finding joins that of the PAC considering the proposed extension to the Yancoal Stratford mine at Gloucester.

Groundswell Gloucester applauds this PAC decision and we hope that this is the first of many such decisions that recognise the incompatibility of extractive industries with agriculture, tourism and other sustainable industries. Hopefully this result foreshadows growing sanity in the evaluation of major project and a willingness to look beyond fleeting benefits into the future of our land and water.

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