

Key achievements emerging from the SLACC case at Public Inquiry October 2021

Despite being a very small charity, SLACC connected with a number of academics and experts on climate change, and with FILE's help, engaged a first-class legal team to challenge the case for the mine put forward by West Cumbria Mining (WCM). Our expert witnesses, and the witnesses Friends of the Earth (FOE) used to address complementary points, were able to present evidence about the true nature of this mine, and the harm it would cause to the Planning Inspector appointed by the UK Government. Whilst we would be unwise to predict what the Inspector will recommend in his report to Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities), or Mr Gove's final decision on the mine, we are confident that our input to the inquiry, and the media discussion it has instigated, have made a significant contribution to both national and global opposition to new fossil fuel development.

Even if SLACC's intervention "only" achieves a modified coal mine with lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, both scope 3 and operational, which the Inspector has to recommend due to currently ambiguous UK planning law, SLACC, supported by FOE, will have made some powerful points which are likely to precipitate stronger legal provisions to stop future coal mines, and, we hope, effective decarbonisation of the steel industry.

- SLACC evidence to the Inquiry has uncovered the reality behind WCM's attempt to extract and sell high sulphur Cumbrian coal that would have been exported to Asia, causing SO₂ pollution and GHG emissions from steel plants that are not restricted by UK and EU pollution and binding carbon reduction targets. It is to be hoped that the Inspector will conclude that there is no need for this coal and recommend refusal of the planning application.
- If the Inspector decides to impose a sulphur content limit that would enable the coal to supply the UK and EU steel industry, he can then consider our evidence on the pace of Green Steel progress in the UK and EU. Our evidence also forced WCM's expert advisers to admit that, in their predictions of ongoing markets for coking coal, they are "gambling" on the failure of binding UK and EU climate reduction targets. This shocking revelation has echoes across the globe, and we have helped to bring this fact out into the open.
- Evidence presented at the Inquiry also forced WCM to seek new advisers, who very clearly stated that Carbon Capture and Storage for coal-based steel plants is both technically difficult and expensive, and that increased steel recycling is the best option for decarbonisation, followed by replacement of coking coal with hydrogen.
- SLACC also forced WCM to revise the methane capture scheme and S106 agreement they developed to argue that this would be a "net zero coal" mine making it much more expensive for WCM and other fossil fuel companies to

make the “net- zero’ argument. FOE’s co-ordinated evidence on carbon offsetting then destroyed the offset pretence on the residual operational emissions.

- The last, and equally important body of evidence presented, was on the “100% substitution myth”, used by so many fossil fuel extractors to argue that there would be no additional GHG emissions caused by their developments, because it would not increase the global extraction and use of fossil fuels. SLACC’s expert witness made the economic case, aspects of which were supported by FOEs witness, and a detailed argument, specific to global coal markets was presented by FOE.