EMAIL TO: planning@hilltops.nsw.gov.au

SUBJECT: Objection - Blantyre Farms DA 2020/0005, Intensive Piggery, Eulie

Road Harden NSW

Dear Hilltops Councillors

I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and pay my respects to Elders,

past, present and emerging.

I welcome this opportunity to lodge a personal objection in response to the Blantyre

Farms Development Application (DA) 20/0005 and corresponding Environmental Impact

Statement (EIS), for a large-scale intensive piggery to be situated approximately 5 kms

from the Harden Murrumburrah township. I would respectfully request Hilltops Council

and Councillors as the consent authority and decision makers, give thorough

consideration to my objection points and comments.

I am very concerned about the Applicant’s proposal and the significant ramifications,

risks and impacts including cumulative impacts, to animals, our fragile environment and

people, which would arise if this DA was approved.

I am also concerned that if this DA was approved, there could be future expansion or

modification of DA’s submitted by the Applicants. This has been the case with piggeries in

the Young and Lismore regions, and as was the case with the Pepe’s Ducks

development in Harden.

The *Shifting Mindset on Farm Animal Welfare* report commissioned by the

federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) highlighted the significant

change in public perceptions, expectations and concerns about how we use, exploit and

“farm” other animals. The Futureye research and report confirmed 95% of respondents viewed farmed animal welfare with concern and 91% wanted reform to address these animal welfare concerns. The report also highlighted a lack of public trust and confidence in government, including the overall lack of transparency, noting inherent conflicts of

interest.

Equally valid concerns about our fragile environment, heritage and biodiversity continue

to increase with strong views and expectations held by a broad section of the Australian

public. The loss of critical Aboriginal heritage, rapid decline in biodiversity, land clearing

and degradation, soil erosion and contamination, lack of surface and groundwater

security, pollution including emissions caused by animal agriculture, are just some of the

many broadly held and valid public concerns.

As a local government authority, Hilltops Council (HC) is compelled to act impartially and ensure the correct and consistent application of local, state and federal legislation, including the assessment of planning proposals, has transparently and thoroughly been made. Councillors are elected to objectively represent community, including on matters which hold strong public interest. It is imperative that decision makers not ignore public interest matters or place the unsustainable, short-term, economic benefits of a privately owned commercial business ahead of the welfare of animals, the environment or the long-term best interests of the broad community.

The Hilltops community is deserving of a strong economic future for its community

including healthy, fulfilling and sustainable employment which add real value and

diversity to the local population. Rather than being known as the intensive animal factory

farming region of NSW, Council should be encouraging other sustainable ventures which

do not cause immense suffering to animals, destroy an already fragile environment,

risk precious local resources and cause a loss of peaceful amenity. This particularly applies to the public health risks felt by immediate neighbours and the broader community.

In line with Clause 81 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000*, I

also request Hilltops Council refer a copy of my objection to the Executive Director,

Infrastructure Assessments, NSW Department of Planning and Environment.

**General**

While the submitted DA and corresponding documentation is substantial in volume,

much of the Applicant’s DA and EIS content is ambiguous, lacking in key information

areas requiring critical assessment, and is generally void of adequate justification or

evidence to support their conclusions. It is not sufficient for the Applicants to rely on

statements indicating they have various levels of confidence with many of their non-

evidenced control measures. Similarly, it is unacceptable that many other potential risks and impacts are missing entirely.

As an informed objector, this has greatly diminished and restricted my ability to adequately

respond. It further erodes my level of confidence in the reliability and credibility of the

Applicant’s DA.

The Applicant has failed to adequately assess and respond to all the information

requirements as specified in the Secretary’s Environmental Assessment Requirements

(SEARs). The Applicant has also failed to adequately assess and respond to all

statutory planning requirements and guidelines.

In summary, the Applicant has failed to adequately demonstrate how they would monitor, avoid, minimise, mitigate and manage the serious risks and impacts including cumulative impacts to animals, the environment and people.

I note the NSW Department of Planning and Environment in its correspondence dated

18 October 2018, ‘Request for Input into Secretary’s Environmental Assessment

Requirements’, under Section 5, Consultation 5.1 the Applicant is obliged to ensure

adequate public engagement with key stakeholders, including animal rights activists.

The Applicant’s Engagement Outcomes Report (Appendix G), provides no such

reference and it appears that the Applicant has made no attempt to undertake any such engagement. Further, the Applicant’s project managers, ‘Urbis’, have failed to respond to specific telephone and online enquiries about the DA.

I am particularly concerned about the overall lack of critical regulation. The Applicants

are primarily only held accountable through self-reporting where adequate or effective

monitoring and enforcement is not possible, nor to the rigorous standards expected by the

community and broader public. Given the broad range of significant risks and impacts associated with this significantly large-scale development proposal, reliance on self-reporting does not instil the required level of public confidence.

**Animals, Biosecurity, Disease Management**

Pigs are highly intelligent, affectionate and social beings. It would be abhorrent for

Council to condemn more Blantyre Farms-bred pigs to extreme suffering and misery, painful routine industry husbandry procedures, the “slamming” blunt force trauma death of sick or under-sized piglets, or an arduous transport journey for 6 month old pigs to Melbourne to a Co2 gassing slaughterhouse.

Over the last 3 to 4 decades Australian animal agriculture has increasingly become

industrialised and secretive with intensive animal factory farms becoming common place

across once pristine rural NSW landscapes. These industrial ventures are not only

responsible for the most heinous suffering of millions of sentient beings, they are

destroying our shared environment, risking public health, and totally divorcing us from

the human capacity to feel compassion for others.

Intensive animal agriculture operates on the concept of high volume and mass

production with the conveyor belt running at an ever-increasing pace, to maximise profit

margins for a small minority at the expense of the large majority. As a society, we cannot

continue to sacrifice so much for the personal economic gain of private, profit-driven,

commercial companies. In the case of Blantyre Farms, the pigs are commodified as Standard Pig Units (SPUs). The sole and undergirding focus of Blantyre Farms centres

around profits, not welfare, nor well-being, and certainly not a healthy or sustainable

future for the broad Hilltops region.

Australians are overwhelmingly strongly opposed to intensive animal factory farming and

increasingly demanding that these cruel, abusive and secretive production ventures and

practices are outlawed, not expanded or endorsed. People are deeply distressed and

outraged by intensive animal housing conditions, including confinement in indoor stalls

and farrowing crates, routine invasive husbandry practices without pain relief, the long-

distance transport, and finally, the stunning and slaughter methods adopted by the Australian pig meat industry.

There is also an obscene number of pigs dying, or being killed, in these intensive sheds.

Historically, the Applicant estimated pig mortality rates to be an unacceptable 8,600 pigs per annum, all of whom would be disposed of in open compost pits.

Animal welfare as demanded by the community and public includes animals being

entitled to rights, welfare and protection under the internationally recognised ‘5

Freedoms’. Crucially, this internationally accepted minimum includes both physical and mental state. Good animal welfare implies both physical fitness and a sense of well-being concerning housing, husbandry practices, veterinary treatment, transport and slaughter. Hilltops council cannot ignore what is recognised and expected in Australia and internationally. The Applicant's fleeting responses to animal welfare considerations demonstrates a disconnected and dismissive attitude towards community and public views.

Section 79C(1)(b) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* requires Council to take into account the social impacts of a proposed development. Consideration of increasing wide-spread public expectations regarding the welfare of animals, must therefore be given adequate weight in any and all review and assessment processes. Public interest on this topic continues to be well demonstrated with objections already lodged with Hilltops Council, with other councils assessing intensive animal agriculture planning proposals, with rural communities instigating legal action through legal appeals both in Australia and around the world opposing "a right to harm”.

The Applicants’ have failed to meet the SEARs information requirements with

inadequate inclusion and assessment animal welfare, disease management and

biosecurity. This includes inadequate inclusion of information covering:

* a Herd Health Program;
* a Risk Management System;
* the emergency euthanasia of pigs;
* infrastructure requirements;
* information around water requirements and;
* failing to demonstrate how critically important disease contingency and biosecurity risks and impacts, including cumulative impacts, would be adequately monitored, avoided, minimised, mitigated and managed.

The Applicants’ inclusion of the Australian Pork Limited (APL), ‘Introduction to APIQ’, is

no substitute for a required operational and risk management plan which complies with

legislation. APL literature, on which the Applicant relies, has previously made

numerous claims about a voluntary phase out of sow stalls. In contrast, the

Applicant has included plans for *over 900 dry sow stalls*.

In October 2013 APL was forced to correct their “phase out” claim after being reprimanded by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) for potentially misleading and deceptive conduct. APL was thereby forced to admit that the industry’s proposed “transition" would not result in a complete ban on the use of these cruel devices. Rather, sows will continue to be confined for a significant period of their pregnant lives.

The Applicants have relied on these same ‘hollow’ claims by APL, and are therefore also

providing potentially misleading information in their EIS. One of the most serious concerns with APL’s voluntary phase out is that it relies on industry self-reporting and regulation. While representatives of APL claim that the voluntary phase out will be “independently audited”, the body responsible for auditing appears to be the Australian Pork Industry Quality Assurance Program (APIQ) - a wholly-owned and managed by APL. Self-regulation is a conflicted way of managing animal welfare because at its core it relies on a promise by industry to abide by woefully inadequate animal welfare standards, rather than meaningful monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Edwina and Michael Beveridge confirm in their DA and EIS that Blantyre Farms propose to duplicate their Young shire Golden Grove and Dead Horse Gully piggery infrastructure and farming practices in Harden shire. These “same standards of operation are proposed to be implemented”.

RSPCA Australia as Australia’s leading authorised animal welfare organisation is

opposed to pig related housing/containment infrastructure, and environments including

conditions and practices which are in fact synonymous with the infrastructure

and routine ‘farming’ practices established and undertaken by Blantyre Farms. I fully concur with RSPCA Australia’s opposition to facilities wherein pigs are managed

within intensive confinement. If approved, this is what will be undertaken by Blantyre Farms. That is, if approved, pigs housed in single stalls and/or conventional farrowing crates and other systems where specific provisions designed to meet the welfare of animals, such as bedding and space requirements, cannot be met. I also support RSPCA Australia’s opposition to painful practices such as pig tail docking and teeth clipping. These are practices currently practiced on pigs by Blantyre Farms without any anesthetic or pain relief.

Biosecurity involves serious risks and impacts to both human health and animal health

including, our precious native wildlife. Generally, biosecurity is not a problem for the general population until it is a massive problem.

Intensive factory facilities are cesspits of abnormal and ongoing stress for animals. This includes over-crowded populations and densities culminating in an accumulation of faeces

and urine. These intensive environments have been the petri dishes or the cesspools where diseases such as swine flu, bird flu and other zoonotic illnesses have occurred. These diseases have transpired because they have been introduced by the industry itself. For example, the clear culprit in the outbreak of swine flu in the NSW Hunter Valley were workers who were coming to that property from other piggeries.

Currently around the world, African Swine Fever Virus (ASFV), a highly contagious

disease, has ravaged many countries in Asia and Europe and has recently been

detected near Australian shores in Timor-Lest and New Guinea. As there is no

vaccination or cure for ASFV, many millions of pigs continue to be destroyed as a result.

We have a clear moral and social responsibility to reduce the number of intensive

piggeries, not expand them. Globally the world has been crippled with the COVID-19 pandemic, which many eminent scientists believe originated from “wet markets”. Yet, much of the intense focus has ignored the very breeding grounds for the diseases originating in global, industrial food systems. Much of the focus has also ignored the large-scale destruction of habitats that is forcing animals out of their natural environments and into closer proximity with people and other animals. This is not the first animal-human pandemic and it will not be the last. The world has a long history of deadly pandemics that are, like COVID-19, deeply rooted in our treatment of animals and notably, the estimated 70 billion who are raised and killed for food each year around the world.

Aside from the human tragedy with a mounting death toll, the broad economic

consequences will seriously impact many for a considerable period of time. All of these

issues need close scrutiny and this is why we must end intensive animal factory farming

which is the leading cause of global animal cruelty.

**Environment**

In the environmental context, everything is reliant on and dependent on a connected

eco-chain of complex relationships. Air, water (surface, groundwater and natural water

bodies), eco-systems and soils are also inter-connected to habitat and biodiversity.

Intensive animal factory farms include signiﬁcant negative environmental risks and

impacts to our unique rural landscapes. These intensive industrial animal farms, as is

proposed by Blantyre Farms, have been an ongoing source and cause of serious human

and animal health issues, land use conflicts, and environmental damage. Such instances

have included run off, soil and groundwater contamination, explosions and fires. Impacts upon biodiversity often result in large scale animal suffering and death, serious biosecurity risks, and associated impacts on human health, other land owners, and other animals.

I do not believe that the Applicants have adequately addressed or responded to the

requirements under the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*, the *Water*

*Management Act 2000* or the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.

Site selection is a primary consideration. The topography of the site – local terrain,

surface runoff, dust, katabatic drift of odour and noise will be exacerbated by local

weather conditions, including heavy fogs, rain and wind.

The unsuitable soils, drainage, close proximity to natural water bodies and groundwater

dependent ecosystems, overwhelmingly indicate that the proposed site remains

entirely inappropriate for the proposed development. This is particularly so given its close proximity to sensitive receivers, including the Harden Murrumburrah township.

It is important to note that visual/amenity and odour impacts is influenced by topography and climate. The land surrounding the proposed piggery site is undulating with a sloping valley. It includes open woodland, native grassland and century old trees including Yellow Box, White Box and Blakely’s Red Gum. A proposed intensive piggery situated within this

type of topography would result in significant risks and impacts through surface runoff,

dust and katabatic drift of odour and noise.

The proposed piggery site is situated on a groundwater vulnerable area. The Harden

Local Environmental Plan 2011 (*Groundwater vulnerability*), is expressly designed to

“protect vulnerable groundwater resources from contamination as a result of

inappropriate development,” and more broadly, to “protect primary industry production

areas from conflicting land use”. The LEP also includes fundamental objectives

regarding the protection of local ecology to “prevent development that would have an

adverse effect on the natural values of waterways in this zone”. Further, the LEP

Intends to “encourage the proper management, development and conservation of natural

and human resources in Harden by protecting, enhancing, managing and conserving

natural resources including, soil, water and vegetation”.

The *Water Management Act 2000* is based on the concept of ecologically sustainable

development – development today that will not threaten the ability of future generations

to meet their needs. This includes ‘the fundamental health of our rivers and groundwater

systems and associated wetlands, floodplains, estuaries” which must be protected. Under the Act, the management of water must be integrated with other natural resources such as

vegetation, soils and land. It also obliges hopeful developers engage in “water management decisions [that] involve consideration of environmental, social, economic, cultural and heritage aspects”. Finally, “social and economic benefits to the state will result from the sustainable and efficient use of water”.

The Applicant’s proposal to use massive volumes of water in a declared groundwater

vulnerability zone is not environmentally sustainable, nor is it in the interests of other

community stakeholders who are dependent on this water source,. As such, it does not adhere to the intent of local and state legislation. In addition to the impact upon other residents of the area who rely solely on bore water or water drawn from Cunningham Creek, ground water dependent ecosystems would be impacted.

The Applicants’ have failed to provide adequate information and assessment of the risks

and impacts surrounding waste management, reuse and soil composition. There has been no comprehensive evidenced assessment of groundwater contamination, risks to land and crops, flood risk, and the effluent irrigation system.

The Applicants’ have failed to demonstrate how they will comply with biodiversity

situated within close proximity to the proposed piggery site, including plant and animal

species listed as vulnerable or endangered in NSW and/or nationally. A 2004 study

confirmed, “continued lack of data to allow a full assessment of the shire’s biodiversity

status carries with it the risk that approved development proposals may result in adverse

impacts on the area’s native plants, animals and ecosystems”.

The proposed intensive piggery will generate vast amounts of pig effluent. Combined

with this, the pig sheds are flushed out daily. The manure pond must hold water and

prevent contaminants in the water from leaching into the groundwater. Not only does the

soil type need to effectively seal dams, it must also hold and contend with the nutrients

from the spread manure and irrigated effluent. Because of unsuitable soil types, the

risk of groundwater contamination is high.

There are significant risks and impacts with surface runoff because of the topography,

and ground water contamination because of unsuitable soil types. This runoff and

leaching can include excess nutrients, pathogens, oestrogens, odorants and heavy

metals causing damage to receiving ecosystems.

When waste water is spilt or leaks from intensive pig farming facilities it can cause a

buildup of nitrates in local waterways. Not only does this contaminate otherwise safe

drinking water, but in such large concentrations this pollution can lead to eutrophication

(‘algae bloom’). The manure ponds and pig sheds would be closely situated to a sensitive creek system and an important water catchment. The Cunningham Creek flows south to join the Jugiong Creek then the Murrumbidgee River at Jugiong.

The Murrumbidgee River is the primary source of drinking water for Harden-Murrumburrah and other communities to the west. Along the creek, the Cunningham Weir is an extensive stretch of water. It is an important breeding habitat for species of waterbirds, including the black swan. Just as important is its role as a resting, feeding and shelter area for migratory and transient bird species. Bird lists compiled prior to the 1980’s include over 80 different species on a yearly listing – additional species have been sighted since. Platypus are also distributed intermittently along the length of the creek.

There have been many evidenced cases of extensive fires which have originated at

intensive animal factory farms which have invariably resulted from infrastructure and this

includes piggery methane ponds and biogas infrastructure which pose a serious fire risk.

These intensive environments have also been the source and cause of ongoing serious

human health issues, environmental damage, fires, contamination and pollution.

The DA and EIS submitted by Blantyre Farms (Edwina and Michael Beveridge) proposes

fertilising this property in the same way they fertilise their other piggery properties,

including the spreading of pig waste (effluent and liquid) solids, and decomposed (dead)

pigs. This ‘recycled’ waste, pollution and contamination has dire consequences, posing significant risks via impacts such as odour, disease, biosecurity, vermin and contamination of soil and water. Of particular concern are surface water, ground water, natural water bodies, groundwater dependent ecosystems and ecological communities.

Across NSW we have experienced significant impacts from drought, bushfires resulting in

the loss of approximately 1.5 billion native species, and a growing lack of surface and groundwater security. The Hilltops region has not escaped these climate emergency impacts and must ensure priority is given to the local environment and biodiversity.

**People**

The human stakeholders most at risk of impact include a large number of immediate

neighbours, the extended Harden-Murrumburrah community, employees, our indigenous

Aboriginals and their cultural heritage. As outlined above, there are numerous serious risks and impacts associated with the proposed development. These issues include public health and wellbeing, disease and biosecurity, unpleasant and health-impacting odours, loss of peaceful amenity, disposal of massive volumes of animal waste containing dangerous pathogens, and the potential contamination of drinking water sources, This may lead to serious impacts upon the health of nearby communities.

The majority of the immediate, close and surrounding neighbours to the proposed

piggery site have expressed concern in respect to the loss of amenity and the

significant sight lines from their homes, additional sight lines from other properties and

that the development will also be visible from public vantage points, including Jugiong

Road and Bouyeo Road.

In terms of odour, the proposed Blantyre intensive factory farm piggery includes a

number of receivers and the population density surrounding the proposed piggery is

intense. There are significant community amenity and environmental impacts on the

local landowners, including houses on the southern edge of Harden township.

Intensive animal factory farming often involves the use of large amounts of antibiotics.

This can result in the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of diseases (also known

As “superbugs”) which can be transferred to humans. In spite of increasing concerns

being raised, the government, even with its current focus on biosecurity, has failed to

investigate and satisfy public health authorities that there will not be any further cases of

antibiotic resistance in the general public. This leaves people, particularly workers in

intensive animal factory farms, at serious risk.

The Applicants have failed to satisfactorily address Section 129 of the POEO Act 1997

which requires “the occupier of any premises at which scheduled activities are carried

on under the authority conferred by a licence must not be the cause or permit the

emission of any offensive odour from the premises to which the licence applies”.

The Applicants have again failed to adequately respond to all the risks and impacts

surrounding nutrient removal and modelling, effluent storage, environmental

management controls, groundwater, noise and traffic movements.

Working in an intensive animal factory farm environment exposes individuals to obvious

serious health risks. Such work, however, also has serious risks and impacts to an

individual’s emotional and mental health and general wellbeing. Staff who are continually

surrounded by animals demonstrating suffering, sickness and pain will be impacted.

Employment in rural areas is very important. The rural population and our young people

should not be limited in choice of employment, career paths, the acquisition of

skills, or the enjoyment and self-fulfillment occupations can instil in individuals.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

In addition to the individual risks and impacts outlined in my objection, when combined,

these are cumulative risks and impacts. The ‘precautionary principle’ must be applied

in environmental planning decision-making, and conservation of biological diversity and

ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration. The ‘precautionary principle’

requires decision-making to give the environment the benefit of the doubt.

Thank you for reading and considering my objection to DA 2020/0005. For the reasons outlined above, I strongly urge the state government agencies required to provide General

Terms of Approval refuse to grant these and all associated licenses. I am

also requesting that Hilltops council, as consent authority, refuse the Blantyre Farms DA

for an intensive factory farm piggery.