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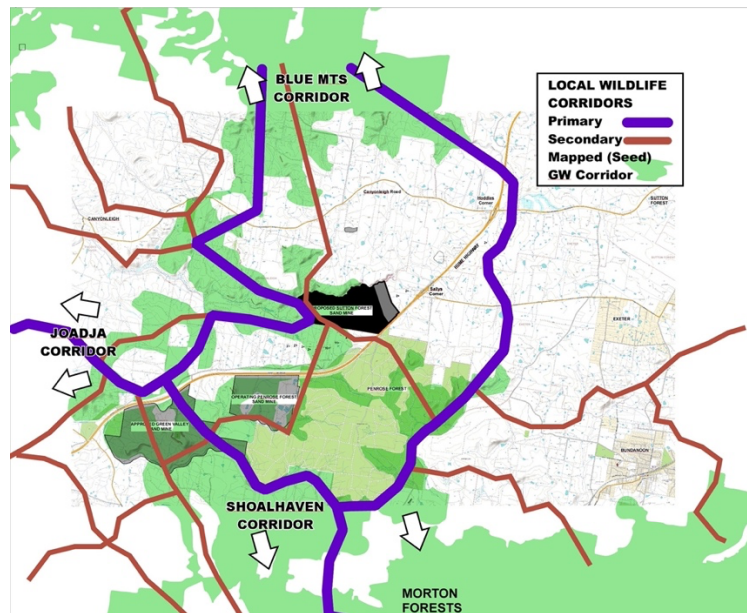
3 December 2023

**Objection to the State Significant Development: Sutton Forest Sand Quarry
SSD-6334**

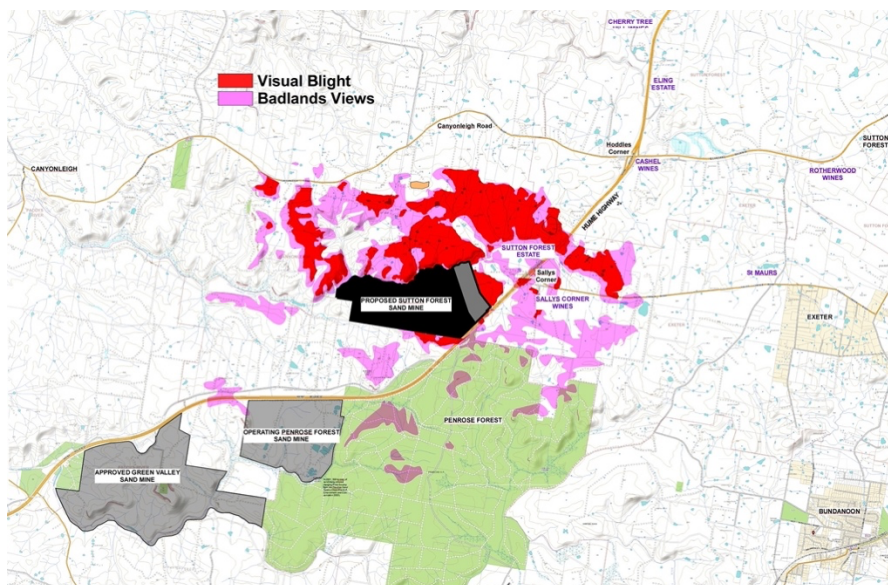
I am submitting an **objection** as this proposal, for what Hi-Quality Quarry Products Pty Ltd has called a sand ‘quarry’ (despite being a ‘**mine**’), is a direct threat to the Southern Highlands of NSW and an indirect threat to wider and central Sydney. This proposal for a State Significant Development is almost unknown to wider and central Sydney, which it both directly and indirectly threatens. There has not been sufficient information or communication with the local community, wider and central Sydney.

I am the beneficiary of a trust that has been established to protect our farmland, which neighbours the proposed **mine**. This farmland has been in our family for more than 40 years. It was purchased, built, and cared for, especially areas of our land that have been kept in their natural state to protect endangered flora and fauna, by my grandparents. Since their passing, our family has continued to care for this land under a trust. I spend a significant amount of time with our family on the farm caring for the native flora and fauna, farming, development of the land, engaging with the community, and supporting local churches and tourism.

The proposal states that it plans to clear 110 hectares of land, mostly native bushland, and mine sandstone to a depth 60 m below ground level – well below the water table. The silica rock will be processed on site by crushing to sand and trucked out 24/7, 365 days for 30 years. The pit will eventually be filled with trucked-in waste, becoming Sydney’s new tip. The size of the proposed **mine** and plant is massive; half the Sydney CBD and more than 5-times that of Hi-Quality Quarry Products Pty Ltd’s operations at Windemalla and Menangle. This is in the middle of the rural-residential community of the Southern Highlands. This is located at the most fragile point of the Great Western Wildlife Corridor, a region targeted for biodiversity, and the unique Long Swamp ecosystem, which is listed as a threatened ecosystem.



The company proposing this **mine**, Hi-Quality Quarry Products Pty Ltd, has had 33 charges laid by the Environment Protection Authority in Victoria. These charges were made against Hi-Quality Quarry Products Pty Ltd and the company's Director, Patrick James Hallinan. They have also faced 24 penalties from the NSW Environment Protection Authority. **This is not a fit and proper operator that can be trusted to abide by governing regulations.** This proposed **mine** does not have any place in an environmentally sensitive and populated area.



The first proposal was '[slammed](#)' by [NSW government agencies](#) and specialist experts. Wingecarribee Shire Council have and continue to express serious concerns. The revised proposal makes only minor changes. As such, the concerns previously expressed by our community, as well as

wider and central Sydney remain valid. **Hi-Quality Quarry Products Pty Ltd is proposing to destroy us.**

Dust diseases

Silicosis has been predicted as a '**health crisis worse than asbestosis**'. While diagnoses of occupational silicosis among miners, construction workers, farmers and engineers are well known, non-occupational exposure to silica dust near mining and industrial sites is not well known but evidence is mounting, and concerns are being raised frequently. There is enough uncertainty around its effects on communities exposed to dust for short and long periods of time for the precautionary principle to be applied. This **mine** proposal appears to state there is no risk at all to the community because of the lack of research available. This is negligent. The risk of silicosis related to mining has been raised by the [National Dust Diseases Taskforce](#). The Taskforce emphasised that there is risk posed by mining, sandblasting and construction settings. Both within Australia and internationally, communities residing near mining, sandblasting and construction sites are becoming increasingly concerned, anxious and fearful about short- and long-term exposure to dust, and the various health issues it causes from cardiac issues to lung diseases, not just silicosis. These concerns were raised during community consultation with the National Dust Diseases Taskforce.

The Tenterfield community who are continually exposed to dust as a result of a quartz quarry that undertakes sandblasting have [publicly expressed their concern](#). The Marulan community has provided clear evidence of toxic dust spreading from the Peppertree limestone quarry, owned by building and construction material giant, Boral. [The published footage](#) was filmed over a three-year period from 2015 to 2018, showing blue / grey dust coming out of a rock conveyor and white dust blowing from an uncovered truck. The community said they noticed dust in paddocks and on their roofs. Fear and anxiety associated with this unknown, and highly likely, threat is enough for both Hi-Quality Quarry Products Pty Ltd and governments to withdraw this **mine** proposal. Both the mining company and governments have caused short- and long-term mental health issues (a national crisis itself) among all age groups in these communities alone, as well as the Sutton Forest community. Our community has no doubt other communities are similarly concerned but do not have the resources available to them to express their fears. Concerns about rising PM2.5 levels [have also been reported](#). These reports state that our communities are "blindly" assuming air quality is safe at levels below 25 µg/m³, when there is really "no safe level" of PM2.5 pollution. To reiterate this point, there is [no safe level of exposure](#). If this **mine** proposal is approved, it **will** cause short- and long-term health problems to neighbouring and Southern Highlands residents as a result of ongoing dust exposure, and high-grade silica rock processing and transporting.

Issues relating to silica dust and its health impacts are reported frequently in the media and academic papers - just a few have been highlighted in this submission. These reports alone should be enough evidence for the **mine** proposal to be rejected. Hi-Quality Quarry Products Pty Ltd, state governments and federal governments cannot deny the issues relating to silica dust or neglect to consider community concerns and fears, as well as wider and central Sydney, especially as they face mounting pressure to address the issue among workers nationally. Concerns have been clearly voiced by our communities and it is reprehensible that our lives and livelihoods mean nothing. The **mine** proposal does not consider the true cost to our society.

Water

The mine **will** contribute to the ongoing degradation of water supplies through water runoff and aquifer pollution; and pollute the headwaters of the Sydney water catchment. The New South Wales Independent Planning Commission rejected plans for a coal mine in the Southern Highlands, [finding it posed too great a risk for underground water](#). The proposed sand mine is located not far from this rejected coal mine. It stands to reason that it poses an equal threat to underground water and should also be rejected accordingly. There are already well-known threats to Sydney's drinking water catchments. [These have been warned](#) about in an audit that stated our sensitive waterways are under increasing threat. Similarly, a [study conducted by the University of New South Wales](#) revealed that the impact of mining operations south of Sydney are becoming more widespread, taking its toll on swamps and wetlands as upland streams dry out. As warned, this **mine** proposal threatens to crack underlying sandstone meaning these critical swamps and wetlands **will** dry out. It will lower the water table to an undetermined and unpredictable amount affecting local water supplies.

Other significant concerns, include:

- endangering threatened fauna and flora species identified on site and surrounds,
- air and water pollution with serious health, farming, and environmental consequences,
- disturbing on-site indigenous heritage rock-cave art, deemed highly significant by the OEH and local indigenous communities,
- pollution damage to surrounding bushland, crops, gardens, solar panels, and residences,
- removal of sandstone with its critical role in the ground water hydrology of the wider area,
- noise, vibration, and light pollution. 24/7 disturbing the peace and tranquillity of local residents, wildlife and The Shine of Our Lady of Mercy, a large church and monastery on the mine boundary,
- traffic safety and danger with up to 344 trucks a day (250 average), 24/7 for the next 30 years leaving and entering the Hume Highway, which is already a known high-risk area for traffic accidents,
- the visual horror of a 110-hectare pit replacing native bushland and farmland,

- threatens significantly large and well-established companies such as [Coca Cola](#), and while the community may not be entirely in favour of being in the region, they do not threaten us and make effort to protect their surroundings in the interest of their business and wider community,
- The **mine** proposal would lead to very few jobs - the social, economic, health and environmental risks of mining in this region are too high - with strong economic management, and the value of our agriculture and tourism, there are no long-term issues with employment in the region and as such, the argument that the **mine** will increase employment opportunities cannot be claimed.

Additionally, it should be noted that there is no need for this **mine** as the nearby Green Valley sand mine extracts token amounts just to keep its licence active. It is a mere absurdity that this **mine** proposal would be considered at all or that our community has been forced to fight against it to protect our future, and our children's future.

As the impact of sand mining is an international health and environmental crisis, it is critical for our political leaders to take appropriate measures to prevent further impact. However, sand mining has not yet reached their political agenda, despite the urgency highlighted by UN Environment. Few, if any, measures are being implemented, with the notable exception of the UK and the European Union. Our communities are subsequently left exposed and abused by the ongoing threats. Greater consideration of substitute and sustainable use of the resource could drastically reduce its impact and protect our communities from the destruction sand mines cause.

Yours Sincerely,
 Maev Kerri Fitzpatrick
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