

Centennial's toxic mine waste plans in the Greater Blue Mountains

I strongly oppose **Centennial's toxic mine waste plans.**

Centennial is one of NSW's biggest mining companies, and it has been storing wastewater from coal mine operations for years. It now wants to dump it in pristine waterways leading to Warragamba Dam. Their actions are disgusting, and the government has failed to make this company accountable. Centennial has not adopted technology that effectively cleans the wastewater of heavy metals, brine and salt that is toxic to aquatic life in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

This is a World Heritage Area and is supposed to be protected. Why has this company's disgraceful behaviour been permitted and allowed to continue?

The NSW Government MUST stop Centennial getting away with this unconscionable behaviour. They are responsible for the stock of toxic wastewater. They MUST NOT be permitted to release millions of litres of toxic wastewater into waterways that feed to Warragamba Dam.

Centennial brazenly has submitted a "modification" proposal to dump toxic waste in a reservoir at the headwaters of Sydney's drinking water catchment. This MUST be denied strongly by our state government.

A few years ago, Minister for the NSW Environment Matt Kean created the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area, a place with more than 80 rare and threatened species and 16 threatened ecological communities.

Centennial mining operations are adjacent to the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area. Their intensive mining methods have destroyed aquifers, resulting in drying out of endangered upland peat swamps. Is this not a conservation area and why has this company been allowed to continue operations degrading environmental values in this protected place? Their underground coal mining has damaged these groundwater aquifers under the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area. To drain the resulting influx of groundwater into underground coal mines, Centennial removes more than 20 billion litres of groundwater every year, interrupting groundwater supply and drying out peat swamps that erodes environmental values.

Approximately 5,000,000,000 litres of mine wastewater is stored underground in Angus Place mine as well as Springvale mine. To continue mining, Centennial proposes to discharge this waste into Sydney's drinking water catchment. Our government MUST OPPOSE Centennial's plan.

Centennial's plan is to release five Olympic-sized swimming pools of "predominantly untreated groundwater" per day into Sydney's drinking catchment. This naturally will make its pollution worse. This is because EnergyAustralia's Mount Piper power station will be offline for maintenance and in the past it has taken and absorbed this water for their power station cooling towers.

Centennial therefore wants to release an additional 42 million litres per day of mine wastewater to Thompsons Creek Reservoir (for up to 111 days at a time) to cover Mount Piper outage periods. This will consist of up to 18 million litres per day of water through the water treatment plant and 24 million litres a day of untreated water (only sediment will be removed). We are referring to untreated contaminated water!

Thompsons Creek Reservoir discharges via tributaries of the Coffs River that flows through a World Heritage listed national park and ultimately to Warragamba Dam.

This is disgusting! Centennial is dumping this problem in the government's hands, without solving it in a way that does not detrimentally affect the environment and indeed people. **If Centennial cannot find a solution then they MUST suspend operations whilst Mount Piper power station is offline.** They obviously place monetary profits above the health and safety of nature and Sydney residents. They expect their proposal to be accepted because it is the cheapest option for them. **The government must reject Centennial's proposal in its entirety to protect nature and people. Additionally, taxpayer money should not be used to finance another way that supports Centennial to retain their profits.**

It gets worse. This company has the audacity to likely submit a second mine waste proposal to further address stored wastewater. They could apply to release up to 26.5 million litres per day into Wangcol Creek consisting of 16.5 million litres per day treated water via the water treatment plant and 10 million litres per day untreated

water (only sediment will be removed) *for up to 4 years*. Polluted untreated water 10 million litres per day multiplied by 365 days per year is 3,650 million litres per year multiplied by 4 years and the figures are really staggering. 14,600 million litres of untreated water affecting most of Sydney's residents. The health concerns are unbelievable. The government must consider the negative ramifications of this proposal and the possibility of disease, epidemics and a strain on our already burdened health care system. People could die and once the community find out what has happened, if the government does approve this reckless proposal there will be consequences.

In total, the modifications will contemplate discharge of combinations of treated and untreated mine waste totalling up to 68.5ML/day of water directly and indirectly (via Thompsons Creek Reservoir) into the catchment for Sydney's drinking water supply.

I am strongly and vehemently opposed to Centennial's plan. The health of Sydney's drinking water should and must be the state government's priority! Additionally, the ecological value of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and wildlife such as the platypus that is already endangered will be compromised should this proposal be approved.

The company says it will improve the quality of the current discharges; however, a science expert disputes this statement saying it will make pollution worse and will be detrimental to the aquatic ecosystem in the area. This outrageous plan will increase the average release into the waterway from roughly one Olympic-sized swimming pool a day to five Olympic pools a day.

The company's modification report said it needed to discharge the additional water, bypassing its water treatment plant, as the plant was operating at capacity. This company is "passing the buck" to the government to solve a problem they have caused, and the collateral damage will be people and nature if approved!

According to the planning document, the water already released into Wangcol Creek has elevated levels of heavy metals like cobalt, iron, nickel, and zinc and is "predominantly untreated groundwater". The company's planning document said diluting these flows with more water from Angus Place would result in lower concentrations of the contaminants and "improve" the water quality. This is 'greenwashing', as they are trying to sell the idea to the government that everything will be okay, and it won't! It will still be contaminated water!

Dr Wright, an associate professor in environmental science at Western Sydney University, said it would do the opposite in that the "physical amount of pollutants, is actually likely to increase. The salt, nickel, and zinc pollutants in the mine water were poisonous to aquatic life and by his calculations, although less concentrated, the amount of salt would increase from roughly six to eight tonnes a day." So, all aquatic life will die! The complex ecosystems function properly when all its parts work in harmony together. Killing all aquatic life in this area will affect the survival of other species as well. The predicted levels of salt, nickel, and zinc were well above what Dr Wright said was the widely accepted industry standard. The Environment Protection Authority's own environment protection license (EPL) regulates levels of pollution released into the environment and in this instance would be clearly failing the environment. **The EPA has repeatedly failed to protect the environment because its benchmark is too low.** All we have to do is look at the number of destructive fossil fuel projects that have been waved through and approved by the EPA. Residents are extremely concerned for platypuses, waterbirds, and the rakali water rats that live in their bend of the Cocks River. Their waters will be contaminated, and they will die. Vulnerable people with serious health concerns could also die from drinking polluted water especially if they have compromised immune systems. Young children who are still developing strong healthy immune systems could also be exposed to polluted contaminated water. The government must also consider the possibility of litigation that could be taken against them because people's health has been affected due to these high levels of contaminants. **The community expect their government to stand up to Centennial's proposal and place their health and nature as a priority above the mining interests and profits of this company!**

Our platypus will be seriously affected by this proposal. A pregnant or lactating female platypus will eat half her body weight every day. They need a supply of invertebrate life as their diet. Invertebrates are sensitive to the pollutants in wastewater. With the collapse of invertebrate populations this will affect the platypus and its survival. Platypus only live in Australia and need healthy streams and waterways and a healthy supply of food to

survive. But again, because they are voiceless animals they have no rights. We are trying to save this endangered species having successfully introduced the platypus back into the Royal National Park and this company blatantly shows that they do not care about the adverse effects their proposal will have on the platypus' survival in the rivers and streams of the Greater Blue Mountains region.

If this proposal is approved, it would result in a huge increase in pollution, heavy metal and salinity load into the receiving environment. Higher salinity means lower oxygen, which reduces food for platypus. Electro-receptors on their bill locate prey, however salinity disrupts these, they can't find food and they starve to death.

Water experts have previously warned that blending or dilution of dirty water with treated water will exacerbate, rather than address pollution of the Sydney drinking water catchment as the overall load of pollutants will drastically rise.

Centennial MUST be required to treat mine water to ensure that any discharge fully removes contaminants like heavy metals, salt and brine and deliver the zero release system they proposed when the water treatment plant was approved. Why is the EPA and the government accepting less and not making Centennial accountable for their zero release system as was originally proposed? Accepting lower standards threatens the safety of Sydney's drinking water supply and water dependent ecosystems, including endangered and threatened species.

It is not good enough for Centennial to self-monitor the level of contaminants as they have proposed. Centennial has been found to have breached its environmental licence more than 1400 times across 7 coal mine sites in the Greater Blue Mountains region. It is a rogue operator, continuously flouting the rules and destroying nationally endangered ecosystems. This includes a coal mine spill from the Centennial Clarence coal mine into the World Heritage Area that resulted in one of the largest fines in the EPA's history. How can they be trusted? Simple answer is that they cannot be trusted. There is no 'plan B' to divert mine water if monitoring reveals higher than expected salinity levels.

The government planning department must require Centennial to significantly reduce the mining intensity at its underground coal mines to protect the natural environment and to reduce the volume of wastewater sent to Mount Piper power station.

Centennial's proposal is wrong for the environment, native wildlife and people. Centennial cannot be trusted so their proposal MUST not be approved.

Furthermore, because the implications for nature and communities are so dire, the NSW government should commission a public inquiry into mine wastewater produced by Centennial's underground coal mines in the Gardens of Stone region.

The likely significant impacts of these projects on water quality and the fact that they're integral to the expansion of coalmines needs to be referred for assessment under our national Federal environment laws and **assessed under the water trigger test**. The NSW government must insist that Centennial be assessed under these criteria. **The NSW government has a duty of care to protect people's health, native wildlife, their environment and habitat and a Conservation Area and a World Heritage listed area.**

Your sincerely

Janice Haviland