

Centennial's toxic mine waste plans

I strongly oppose **Centennial's toxic mine waste plans in a World heritage listed area and Conservation area due to the negative impacts on the environment, native wildlife and our waterways.**

A water expert has raised concerns that plans by Centennial Coal to discharge contaminated water into the Coxs River near the Blue Mountains will increase salinity and heavy metals within Sydney's main drinking water supply – Warragamba Dam

Dr Ian Wright, a professor of environmental science at Western Sydney University with more than 25 years' experience in the industry, has investigated plans by Centennial Coal, and says that the mine water with elevated levels of salinity also contains arsenic, zinc, selenium, ammonia and fluoride – would be combined with other water containing heavy metals then released into 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 highly contaminated water! Thompsons Creek Reservoir discharges via tributaries of the Coxs River that flows through a World Heritage listed national park and ultimately to Warragamba Dam that provides Sydney's drinking water. These pollutants are above Australian standards and will likely cause 'environmental harm.' Centennial has been given an unrestrained licence to pollute under an ineffective EPA licence. There's no effective treatment by the mine and coal effluent and pollutants are flowing into our waterways, impacting ecosystems, and tainting Sydney's drinking water supply. The Centennial discharge point is the single most polluting wastewater source in the whole Warragamba drinking water catchment.

Unfortunately, the reality is that mining industries will lie and take shortcuts to get approval from our weak Environmental Protection Agency. **The NSW EPA is failing people and nature and MUST stop giving the mining company a licence to pollute.**

Centennial already drains the resulting influx of groundwater into underground coal mines by removing more than 20 billion litres of groundwater every year, interrupting groundwater supply and drying out peat swamps that erodes environmental values. Peat swamps are important ecological communities that are being eroded away. Centennial are already causing environmental harm and damage. They MUST NOT be permitted to do more harm and release millions of litres of toxic wastewater into waterways that feed to Warragamba Dam.

Centennial brazenly has submitted this "modification" proposal to dump toxic waste in a reservoir at the headwaters of Sydney's drinking water catchment, with even more modifications to follow. This MUST be strongly opposed by our NSW government. EnergyAustralia's Mount Piper power station will be offline for maintenance and in the past it has taken and absorbed this water from Centennial for their power station cooling towers. However, now Centennial is seeking a modification to their original approval and their cheapest option is to dump contaminated wastewater into a reservoir that feeds into the Coxs River and through conservation areas.

This is disgusting! Centennial must solve this problem in a way that does not cause further environmental harm for wildlife and people. **If Centennial cannot find a solution then they MUST suspend operations whilst Mount Piper power station is offline.**

Centennial initially proposed to deliver a zero release system when the water treatment plant was originally approved. Why is the EPA and the government accepting less and not making Centennial accountable for their zero release system as was originally proposed?

Centennial MUST be required to treat ALL mine water to ensure that any discharge **FULLY removes contaminants** like all the heavy metals mentioned including salt and brine.

Centennial says it will improve the quality of the current discharges; however, a science expert disputes this statement saying this method will make pollution even worse and will be detrimental to the aquatic ecosystem in the area. This is a company that knows how to 'greenwash concerns to get approval.'

The company's modification report uses the excuse that it needs to discharge the additional contaminated wastewater, bypassing its water treatment plant, as the plant was already operating at

capacity. Centennial then should build a new one or extend this water treatment plant to accommodate and remove all contaminants from all wastewaters. Of course, this will be a financial outlay by Centennial who are still focused on maintaining their profits. So, their modification is to dump 24 million litres a day of untreated highly contaminated water into Thompsons Creek Reservoir that will flow through a Conservation Area and a World Heritage listed National Park to Warragamba Dam, that is Sydney residents water supply.

This has been an ongoing concern by environmentalists, community groups, Environmental Justice Australia, Gardens of Stone Alliance, and NSW Nature Conservation that the proposed coal projects already have and WILL further impact Sydney's water supply and endangered plants and animals. The NSW government should be looking after nature and communities. The NSW Department of Planning must prioritise people and nature over industry. The project has already caused serious environmental impacts such as degraded swamp and wetland areas that support endangered plants and animals.

Centennial has a **terrible track record and cannot be trusted to deliver accurate environmental assessments, in fact always understating their negative impact on the environment.** Chris Jonkers, of the Gardens of Stone Alliance said, "Centennial has an atrocious record of underestimating the impacts of mining in this region on nationally endangered wetlands, water quality and million-year-old rock formations. Their mining activities have destroyed precious federally protected swamps, and they just cannot be trusted to properly assess the impacts of these projects on the environment."

Centennial continually are in breach and face hefty fines most likely subsidised by taxpayers.

- In 2010, Centennial was ordered to pay \$1.5 million for causing irreparable damage to delicate waterways on the Newnes Plateau
- In 2017, the mining company was fined more than \$1 million by the Land and Environment Court for spilling toxic coal sludge into the beautiful Wollangambe River
- In 2021, Centennial entered into a \$150,000 enforceable undertaking with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment after irreversibly cracking million-year-old sandstone formations in the Mugii Murum-ban State Conservation Area.
- Their projects have been lodged as 'modifications' to existing development consents held by Centennial Coal, including the Angus Place coalmine consent (MOD 8) and the Western Coal Services facility consent (MOD 5).

Centennial's plan to pollute Sydney's drinking water supplies is incredibly concerning. It was only seven years ago that successful legal action by the community forced Centennial to even build this water treatment plant in the first place to stop it pumping contaminated mine water into the local catchments. This shows that they are irresponsible and prioritise their profits. However as already mentioned this treatment plant is working at capacity. They again show the same traits of wriggling out of their environmental responsibilities. **They seem unwilling to extend or build a new water treatment plant. So, they must be forced to end operation of this mine.**

Centennial MUST be required to properly treat all mine water to ensure that any discharge fully removes ALL contaminants like heavy metals, salt and brine and deliver the zero release system they proposed when the water treatment plant was initially approved. Why have they been allowed to deliver less than what was initially proposed? There appears to be no accountability, and the EPA has failed in their primary role to protect our environment that provides quality habitat for native wildlife and a sustainable high quality water source for the Sydney community.

Residents are extremely concerned for platypuses, waterbirds, and the rakali water rats that live in their bend of the Coxs River. Their waters will be contaminated, and they will die. 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 that Centennial wants to discharge. With the collapse of invertebrate populations this will affect the platypus and

its survival. With increased pollution of heavy metal and higher salinity this results in lower oxygen, which reduces food for the platypus. Electro-receptors on the platypus' bill also helps them to locate prey. High salinity levels disrupts these receptors so the little food that is left they cannot find, and they ultimately starve to death.

The Platypus only lives in Australia and needs healthy streams and waterways and a healthy supply of food to survive. It is a threatened species and Centennial does not care.

Contaminating Sydney's drinking supply of water from Warragamba Dam is also a serious concern. Vulnerable people with compromised immune systems could be put at further risk from drinking polluted water with higher levels of contaminants. Young children who are still developing strong healthy immune systems could also be vulnerable to polluted contaminated water. Centennial needs to explain why its treatment plant cannot be extended or a new treatment plant built even if they have to suspend operation of their mining whilst a new plant is built. There are no excuses for destroying nature and people's health. Centennial MUST invest in a facility or treatment plant that will do the job properly.

- Dodging their initial responsibility and offloading contaminants into the waterways and swamps of the Greater Blue Mountains, a World Heritage listed site and conservation area (Gardens of Stone) is NOT acceptable.
- Damaging native wildlife habitat is NOT acceptable.
- Polluting the pristine rivers and streams that our endangered platypus and other wildlife need to survive is NOT acceptable.
- Adding contaminants to waterways connected to Warragamba Dam that pollutes Sydney's drinking water is NOT acceptable.
- Risking people's health through contaminated water is NOT acceptable.
- Degrading environmental values through contaminated water is NOT acceptable.
- Destroying Ecologically Endangered Communities (EEC) like our swamps and wetlands is NOT ACCEPTABLE
- Having an EPA that is ineffective and gives Centennial free licence to continue polluting is NOT acceptable.

Centennial's modification plan and must also undergo scrutiny by the Federal Environment Minister under the water trigger criteria. The pumping out of large quantities of mine water will result in the drying-out of and damage to unique wetlands due to a drop in the water table, such as the 'swamp everlasting' and the migratory Latham's Snipe. **There are significant impacts of these projects on water quality. If Centennial won't refer the projects to the Federal Government themselves, then the NSW Planning Minister Paul Scully has a duty of care and absolutely must refer Centennial to ensure a thorough assessment of impacts on our catchments in this region applying the water trigger test under national environmental law.** Under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, the federal government has the power, known as the 'water trigger', to subject large coal mines to a rigorous assessment for the project's impacts on surface and ground water. Previous breaches by Centennial confirm that there has been damaging impacts on our catchment and wetland areas.

The 'water trigger' power exists because water is vital for thriving ecosystems and communities, and lawmakers recognise communities expect careful scrutiny of large mining projects to properly and thoroughly examine their impact on water resources before giving them the green light.

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 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, Martin Derby