

Submission on the proposed development of Bowdens Silver Project

I welcome the opportunity to voice my concerns regarding the proposed development Bowdens Silver Project at Lue. I am an experienced educator, having taught secondary students for close to 40 years in a variety of locations, including the Upper Hunter Valley in NSW. One of the cornerstones of the National Curriculum is the teaching of sustainability and the threats posed by climate change and loss of biodiversity. Bowdens proposed project is one which would negatively impact the environment to such a degree that it should not be given approval.

The proposed project will have a disastrous impact in a number of key areas. Information suggests that it would destroy over 380 hectares of native vegetation, including over 180 hectares of critically endangered box gum woodlands. Offset plantings will not replace the habitat currently provided by these trees as it can take hundreds of years for trees to develop the hollows used as nesting sites by birds and other species. These trees also provide root systems that hold soil together and lower the water table, thus helping to prevent problems associated with salinity. Again, new offset plantings will take time to have the same impact, and time is of the essence in the current environmental crisis.

The following information has been provided by the Hastings Bird Watchers Inc. They have stated that -

“The EIS details 14 threatened fauna species found on the proposed mine site. This includes many threatened species of birds listed under the EPBC Act 1999 and or the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. These are the Diamond Firetail, Brown Treecreeper, Speckled Warbler, Grey-crowned Babbler, Hooded Robin, Varied Sitella, Scarlet Robin, Barking Owl and Dusky Woodswallow. The Regent Honeyeater was not recorded during the short EIS surveys, but it is highly migratory and there are now very few left in the wild. The proposed mine site is good habitat for this critically endangered bird and should not be cleared. This site is also core koala habitat. Koala numbers in NSW were falling even before the recent fires and they could be extinct in NSW before 2050.”

Surely these statistics are of such concern, that they will indicate that the negative impacts on biodiversity of this project are too great for approval to be given?

A recent report from the Nature Conservation Council states that “NSW is in crisis. Eastern Australia is one of the world’s top 11 deforestation hotspots, alongside the Amazon, Borneo, and the Congo. At least 1000 species of plants and animals are facing extinction, and the destruction of their habitats is the leading threat.”¹

It continues with the following alarming information- “It is estimated there are now fewer than 21,000 koalas left in NSW, a tiny fraction of the millions that are thought to have occupied the state’s forests and bushland at the time of European settlement 230 years ago. Koala numbers plummeted 33% between 1990 and 2014, and the species is now listed as vulnerable to extinction at the state and national levels.”²

As the proposed Bowdens Silver Project will remove koala habitat, this is another reason to question its approval.

¹ Towards Zero Deforestation, Barham D et al accessed from <https://www.nature.org.au/media/355843/181109-tzd-report-final.pdf> 26.7.20

² Op Cit

The impact of drought has been clearly felt across many regions of Australia with predictions for future droughts becoming more severe and frequent. The following map reflects that the region for the proposed mine to already be one that is highly vulnerable.

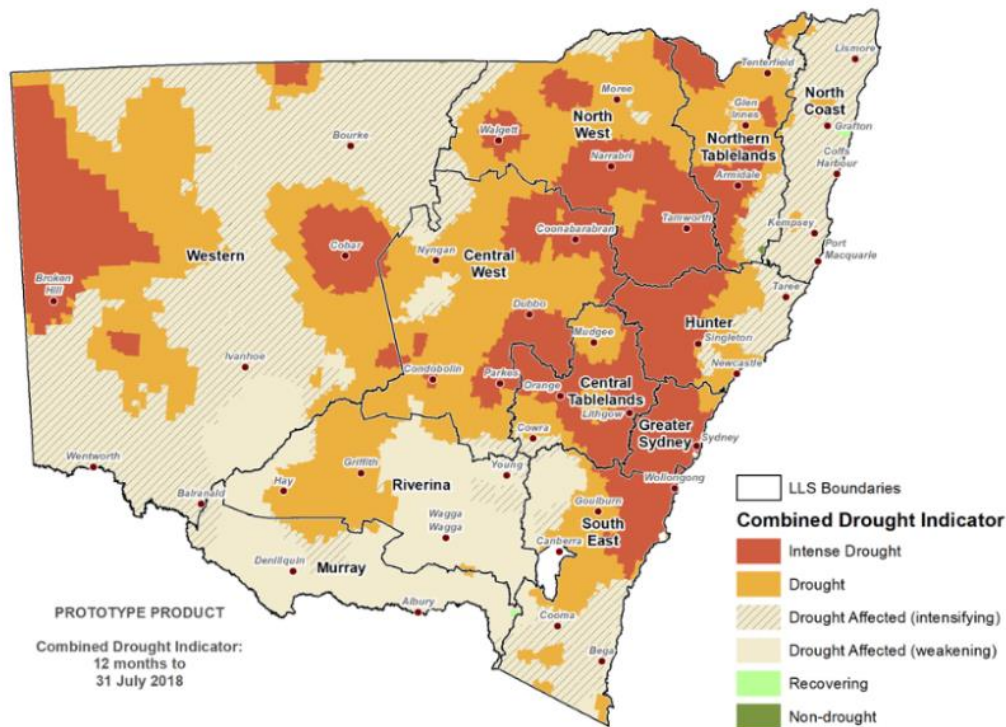


Figure 1. Verified NSW Combined Drought Indicator to 31 July 2018

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Whilst the impact statement refers to the use of recycled water, it also states that it will be collecting surface water on-site, which would result in a reduction in baseflow to both Hawkins Creek and Lawsons Creek. As the proposal will result in the production of highly toxic lead as part of its operation, there is also the danger that this could pollute precious water supplies. This again suggests that this proposed development should be rejected.

I wish to be able to continue to teach my students about the positive actions taken by our government authorities to protect the environment, being aware that we are custodians for future generations. We want our environment to be rich with biodiversity that has been sustained through responsible controlling measures. I therefore ask that the proposed Bowdens mining application be rejected.

Catherine Gibson

³ Accessed from <https://www.impactag.com.au/the-impact-of-drought-current-challenges-and-building-future-resilience/> 26.7.20