

Submission: Maules Creek Continuation Project Narrabri Shire

I am writing to strongly oppose the proposed **Maules Creek Continuation Project Narrabri Shire (MMCM Continuation Project)**.

As a proud Gomeri woman I have strong connections to Narrabri, the Pilliga and surrounding areas. When the first stage of this mine was proposed, my people, members of the local farming community and many other concerned members of the public strongly objected to this mine. Our concerns were valid and in the short and long term interests of all Australians.

Now there is a proposal for the mine to be expanded and continued for a further 10 years **commencing from 2034**. Surely this should raise red flags immediately. Why would a mining corporation need to 'lock in' approval so far into the future? How can the Government be sure of Australian and global climate conditions as well as food security, water security, conservation requirements, biodiversity needs and threats and levels of local and global emissions so far into the future?

Banking an approval that won't start until 2034

The NSW Government should not be approving a coal mine expansion now that will not even start until 2034 – it is locking in greenhouse gas emissions far into the future that we can't afford.

This proposal is designed to 'bank' an approval now before climate laws are strengthened further in response to the rapidly escalating impacts of global warming in the form of more extreme weather events.

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage

Due to the proposed project's increased mining area size and closer proximity to the creek a more comprehensive, updated Aboriginal cultural heritage survey must be undertaken. It is a well-documented fact that Aboriginal people camp close to creeks and rivers therefore more cultural items will be present. Irreversible damage and permanent loss to Aboriginal cultural heritage in the declared area must be avoided.

Leard State Forest

The Leard Forest is home to a broad variety of wildlife including terrestrial species and birdlife, many being listed as Vulnerable, Endangered and Critically Endangered. The location of creeks, mature native trees with hollows, native shrubs and ground covers and grassy areas provide a varied and vast amount of habitat for these species. The mining operations including noise (both machinery and blasting), fumes and light pollution have an immense effect on all forms of wildlife.

A substantial amount of the endangered ecological White Box Grassy Woodland occurs within the Leard Forest.

I note that a large amount of clearing has occurred due to mining approvals in the area and as noted in the Ecological Report commissioned by the Lock the Gate organisation and stated;

'Approximately 3,800 ha of native vegetation has been removed mainly from Leard under current BTM mining approvals.'. *Executive Summary, Conservation significance of Leard State Forest for Swift Parrots Report*; John Muchan, Ecologist, Botanical Animal Ecology

Critically Endangered Swift Parrots and Leard State Forest Habitat

Swift Parrots are listed as Critically Endangered, the listing recognising they are close to extinction. Mature trees are essential for the survival of the Swift Parrots both for nesting and foraging. Without mature trees there will be a shortage of food to sustain these unique parrots.

As noted in the Conservation significance of Leard State Forest for Swift Parrots Report:

‘Approximately 3,800 ha of native vegetation has been removed mainly from Leard under current BTM mining approvals. Much of this vegetation was suitable habitat for Swift Parrot (Umwelt 2017). This includes 1,665 ha of habitat for Swift Parrots cleared under the original MCCM’. *Executive Summary, Conservation significance of Leard State Forest for Swift Parrots Report*; John Muchan, Ecologist, Botanical Animal Ecology

The Dept of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water states:

‘Swift Parrots breed in Tasmania during spring and summer and migrate to woodlands across south-east mainland states for the rest of the year. Clearing of high quality breeding and foraging habitat has been a key driver of population declines over the past 150 years. Actions to improve habitat, including limiting harvest of old growth nesting trees and winter feeding habitat, and also attempts to reduce the impacts of Sugar Gliders, are of greater immediate benefit but will need to be amplified to reverse negative population trends.’
<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/species/20-birds-by-2020/swift-parrot>

The environmental impact assessment for the MCCM Continuation Project failed to include an assessment of cumulative impacts as stated in the points below, with other important matters noted below from the report ‘*Conservation significance of Leard State Forest for Swift Parrots Report*’, p30:

- ...the environmental impact assessment for MCCM Continuation Project to include an assessment of cumulative impacts to Swift Parrots from previous habitat clearing for the BTM complex and other previously approved developments in the local area.
- ... rapid habitat assessment data estimate the development will result in the removal of approximately 50,000 Swift Parrot feed trees including more than 19,000 large White Box trees.
- ...a biodiversity assessment for the original MCCM project failed to accurately identify that a significant impact to Swift Parrots was likely under the EPBC Act (Cumberland Ecology 2011, pg. I-53).
- the project is clearly within 'habitat critical to the survival' of the Swift Parrot as defined in the National Recovery Plan for the Swift Parrot (Australian Government 2024a).
- > Protecting areas deemed habitat critical to survival from developments (e.g. mining activity) is identified in the National Recovery Plan for the Swift Parrot (Australian Government 2024a) as a Priority One (highest priority) action to ensure the conservation of the species.
- > Biodiversity offsets for Swift Parrots from developments within habitat critical to the survival of the Swift Parrot are unlikely to provide measurable benefits to the species in the context of the extremely rapid decline in the species' population.
- the project is clearly within a priority site for the species and arguably also within a priority area for the species based on the NSW Department of Planning & Environment (2024) Saving our Species strategy for the Swift Parrot.

►there is a strong case for the Leard to qualify as an Important Bird & Biodiversity Area (IBA) based on its regular use by Swift Parrots. *Conservation significance of Leard State Forest for Swift Parrots Report*; John Muchan, Ecologist, Botanical Animal Ecology.

This project will clear over 500 hectares of key foraging habitat for the Swift Parrot, despite only 500 of them remaining in the wild, and will push the species closer to extinction. This is a key site for Swift Parrots and must not be put at risk.

The project will also clear a further 428 hectares of the beautiful Leard State Forest, resulting in over 46% of the State Forest having been cleared in total for three coal mines. Our scarce and precious public lands should not be destroyed for coal mine profits.

Whitehaven is a serial offender

The compliance record of Whitehaven Coal is appalling. In the last 10 years, Whitehaven has been found guilty or investigated for breaches of the law on 35 occasions, many of them including multiple offences. They have been prosecuted numerous times.

Water and communities at risk

This expansion poses a major risk to local water resources – it will suck down water beneath local creeks and the groundwater used by farmers to water their stock. Whitehaven has already been prosecuted for stealing water at the Maules Ck coal mine at the height of the last drought.

The expansion will harm the local farming community at Maules Ck and cause negative social impacts.

It will further empty the district of families through alienation of productive land, and create dangerous dust pollution and escalating noise for surrounding areas, whilst creating division and conflict. It will exacerbate the housing crisis in the region.

Turbocharging climate change

NSW communities are already experiencing devastating impacts from global warming but this project will produce an extra 238 million tonnes of total greenhouse gas pollution.

Following the recent NSW Court of Appeal decision on the Mt Pleasant coal mine, Whitehaven Coal should be required to fully assess the impacts of the downstream emissions from the project on the local environment and community. This requires proper attribution science to be conducted. None of this has been done in the current EIS.

The direct emissions from the mining process itself, of over 3 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, will completely undermine NSW achieving climate targets.

Conclusion

The Precautionary Principle and Intergenerational Equity must be taken into consideration in considering this proposal.

The NSW Government should not approve this project as it would be effectively enabling and consenting to a mining corporation NOT to have to take into account a broad range of conditions that could exist in 2034 to 2044. There is no way to gauge cumulative impacts of unknown projects approved and operating by 2034. With such

unknown factors surely approval of this proposal is only in the interest of the mining corporation and not in the Public's interest.