1

870 Ophir Rd
Summer Hill Creek
NSW 2800
www.cwecouncil.com

Resource Assessment
Department Planning, Housing and infrastructure
Locked Bag 5022,
Parramatta NSW 2124

Tuesday 18 November 2025

Submission of Objection: Mod 8 – Ulan West Continued Operations

Central West Environment Council (CWEC) is an umbrella organization representing conservation groups and individuals in central west NSW working to protect the local environment for future generations.

CWEC has continued to object to the ongoing expansion of large-scale thermal coal mining in the Mudgee Region because of the cumulative impact of greenhouse gas emissions, loss of endangered biodiversity and destruction of vital water sources.

We strongly object to Mod 8 – Ulan West Continued Operations (the proposal). The assessment of impacts is very poor because this large mine expansion has not been fully assessed as a new project.

Biodiversity Impacts

The cumulative impact on biodiversity of the three large mining operations in the Mudgee Region have not been assessed for the proposal. The significant cumulative loss of habitat including old growth trees, understory, grasslands, rocky outcrops, caves and ridgelines over hundreds of square kilometers has not been assessed.

The proposal is to disturb an additional 1,734 ha of landscape containing critical habitat values for a range of endangered and other species. The area of impact has not been rigorously assessed. The risk from subsidence to a further 6.5km of sandstone escarpment including cliff lines, caves, rocky overhangs and other habitat features is a significant increase in threats to endangered species threatened with serious and irreversible impacts (SAII), particularly microbats.

The ongoing destabilization and removal of rocky outcrops providing irreplaceable habitat including breeding sites for a significant number of microbats species will cause a major cumulative impact. The assessment does not identify the impacts on threatened microbats, specifically the Large-eared Pied Bat and Eastern Cave Bat from the Wilpinjong Mod 3 proposal or the Moolarben Open Cut 3 extension proposal. The Wilpinjong Mine proposed expansion includes the removal of breeding and roosting sites in a regional hotspot area for microbats, possibly disturbed and relocated by current mining operations in the region. The Moolarben Mine has impacted on a very large area of threatened microbat habitat. The Open Cut 3 expansion will cause additional cumulative impact.

CWEC does not support the analysis provided in the Cumulative Impact Scoping Summary (Appendix 19) that the cumulative biodiversity impacts from Moolarben and Wilpinong Coalmines are not significant. While this summary report refers to the Moolarben OC3 extension proposal, it fails to identify the Wilpinjong Mod 3 expansion.

The cumulative impact on the threatened species listed under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act as SAII entities, including Large-eared Pied Bat, Eastern Cave Bat, Regent Honeyeater and Box Gum Woodland, have not been adequately addressed in the assessment for the large proposed extension of the Ulan West underground mine.

Large-eared Pied Bat (*Chalinobolus dwyeri*):
The assessment for breeding sites for this SAII entity was very poor and not clearly described. No expert advice was used, as indicated in the BDAR and the survey of roosting sites was potentially undertaken at the wrong time of year to find breeding activity. No dates have been provided for the 28 days of habitat survey.

Subsidence predictions are that 20% of potential habitat will be impacted by rockfalls. This is a significant increase in habitat disturbance in the region.

Box Gum Woodland Critically Endangered Ecological Community (CEEC):
The assessment fails to address the cumulative loss of this CEEC across the region due to mining disturbance. The proposal to clear an area of revegetated CEEC for the construction of a new tailings storage on an area of rehabilitated open cut mine is unacceptable. There has been no apparent effort to find a better, less impactful site for this new proposed infrastructure. The impact of groundwater drawdown over the area of impact is also likely to impact remnant areas of Box Gum Woodland CEEC. This has not been assessed.

Regent Honeyeater (*Anthochaera phrygia*)
The potential for Regent Honeyeater to occur in the area of impact is very high. Recent breeding records nearby on the Goulburn River have not been identified. The area of impact is adjacent to the mapped Key Biodiversity Area for this species. The cumulative loss of woodland habitat for this SAII species is significant and has not been assessed.

New Holland Mouse (*Pseudomys novaehollandiae*):
A breeding population of the species has been recorded to the East of Ulan mine. Habitat in the proposed area of impact would be suitable for this vulnerable species. A significant impact assessment should have been included in the Matters of National Environmental Significance Report (Appendix 20)

Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*):
We note that two recent records of Koala have been detected close to the area of impact. The survey effort was concentrated over a one month period in the vegetation proposed to be cleared. There were no general surveys conducted across the entire area of impact. The presence of Koala feed trees and noted sightings by local neighbours over many years indicates a high probability of Koala being present in the area of impact. There is an important breeding population of Koala in the region. The assessment of Koala presence is very limited.

The impact of the proposal on Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (GDE) in the form of riparian vegetation and threatened ecological communities that occur within the predicted groundwater drawdown areas is not well assessed.

CWEC considers that the biodiversity impacts of this proposed mine expansion are significant and have not been adequately assessed. The proposal should be rejected on the grounds of cumulative and significant biodiversity loss.

Water Impacts

The proposal will have significant cumulative impact on water sources in both the Hunter catchment and the Murray-Darling Basin.

The assessment of water impacts is very poor and does not clearly identify the current water management issues on the existing mine site. The increased interception of productive groundwater sources, loss of critical baseflows over an extended period after the life of mine, the impact of discharges and the cumulative salt load to the Goulburn River is not adequately assessed.

There is very poor information on the volume of water expected to be intercepted by this mine expansion or the cumulative loss of base flows over time to both the Upper Talbragar water source and the Upper Goulburn River water source. The groundwater model is not fit for purpose as it fails to include the full impact of subsidence over the proposed additional longwall panels.

The subsidence caused by the supercritical width panels of 400 m across the new area of impact will cause fracturing of the overburden strata to the surface. This will cause aquifers above and to the side of the longwall panels to be totally depressurized so that they drain into the mine. The cracking disturbance will also capture surface flows. These impacts have not been rigorously assessed or identified.

There is insufficient monitoring and data sets to accurately inform the groundwater model that provides the key predictive impacts to inform the determination. The long term permanent destruction of aquifers across the landscape from longwall mining subsidence is not assessed.

Loss of base flows

The cumulative loss of base flows across the Talbragar and Goulburn Rivers is not provided in the assessment report. Ongoing modification and expansion of longwall mining subsidence impacts since the Ulan West Operations were approved in 2012 has caused significant long term loss of base flows to these river systems.

The Talbragar River is at the headwaters of the Murray-Darling Basin providing inflows to the Macquarie River below Burrendong Dam. These flows provide critical natural flows to the internationally significant Macquarie Marshes. Loss of baseflow during dry scenarios can seriously impact water availability for downstream users including the environment.

The Goulburn River is the most westerly rising tributary of the Hunter River and provides essential flows through Goulburn River National Park and downstream. The drawdown of baseflows and groundwater in general has a significant impact when combine with the impacts of the Moolarben and Wilpinjong Coal Mine in the Upper Goulburn River catchment.

The assessment of impacts on groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs), including the popular tourist destination, The Drip, is highly speculative and not based on scientifically rigorous data.

Increased salt load

The disruption of groundwater and surface water sources and drainage into the mine over an additional 1734 ha of sensitive landscape for 6 more years until 2041 will extend the mine water discharge into the Goulburn River and add at least another 30,000 tonnes to the salt load.

This impact has not been assessed including the cumulative salt load from Moolarben and Wilpinjong Mine discharges. The ecology of the Goulburn River has been significantly impacted by mine water discharge and increased salt load.

New proposed tailings storage

CWEC objects strongly to the proposal to construct a 132 ha tailings storage dam on an old open cut mine area directly adjacent to the Goulburn River. The potential of increased intense storm activity, flooding and infrastructure failure has not been assessed. Neither has the threat of groundwater seepage into the river. The storage of concentrated coal fines next to the river has a high risk of causing toxic pollution incidents and should not be considered. The current management of water levels in the East Pit is a case in point.

The proposal should be rejected on the grounds of insufficient data to assess cumulative water source damage.

Aboriginal Cultural Impacts

The cumulative loss of Aboriginal cultural heritage and connection to the landscape in the region caused by mining impacts has not been addressed. The additionality of loss through the proposal has not been assessed.

The Goulburn River catchment area is highly significant for First Nations people who used the area as a major trading route from the east coast out to central Australia.

The entire area also has evidence of permanent habitation.

The high use of the region by First Nations people is evident through the concentrated records of significant cultural heritage sites.

The NSW environment and heritage agency noted 8 years ago that it '*is concerned that harm to Aboriginal cultural heritage is approaching unacceptable thresholds for the region. Unless adequately compliant with a measured conservation regime, an imbalance of this scale may have permanent intergenerational consequences."*[2]

The proposal to impact on a further 72 cultural heritage sites, including rock art, by further mine expansion fails to recognize the spiritual significance of these sites within the cultural landscape.

Social Impacts

The proposal is predicted to have subsidence impacts on 17 private properties and cause permanent failure or drawdown to a number of stock and domestic bores. The Ulan West Operations has resulted in multiple faming properties being acquired with no further agricultural activities. The loss of community members in the district through the purchase of private property by the Ulan, Moolarben and Wilpinjong Coal Mines has been substantial. Social impacts have included the closure of the Ulan Bushfire Brigade and the amalgamation into the Cumbo Brigade covering a much larger area of operation with fewer volunteers left to adequately service the demand.

The current fire season, driven by climate change extreme weather events, will be intense and cause additional stress on remaining RFS members. These cumulative social impacts have not been identified or assessed. There have already been total fire ban days with out of control fires in the district.

[2] Quoted in IPC Statement of Reasons: Bylong Coal Project. Paragraph 511. https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/pac/projects/2018/10/bylong-coal-project/determination/bylong-coal-project-ssd-6367--statement-of-reasons-for-decision.pdf

Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG)

The proposal is assessed to produce an additional 105 million tonnes of Scope 3 GHG over the 6 year extension period to 2041. This is an unsustainable addition of GHG to the global atmosphere.

Scope 1 emissions were reported to be 53,550 t CO2-e in 2024. However, this is based on the calculation that Ulan Mine Scope 1 emission intensity is *0.0043 t CO2-e / t ROM.* There is no information provided as to how this figure was arrived at.

While methane emissions through ventilation shafts are monitored at Ulan, this data is not reported through any publicly available documentation. Annual methane measurements are not provided in Annual Reports.

In 2014, Ulan Coal reported baseline GHG emissions as 123, 668 CO2-e. These were subsequently reduced to below 100,000 CO2-e [3]with no data provided to explain this drop in emissions. The updated lower baseline level has exempted Ulan Mine from the rules of the Federal Safeguard Mechanism. While Glencore has been reporting GHG under the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting (NGER) Scheme, the details of these reports is not publicly available.

CWEC has serious concerns about the GHG calculations and reporting of Scope 1 emissions. These need to be independently and transparently analysed.

Both Moolarben and Wilpinjong Coal Mines are assessed with an emissions intensity of *0.01 t CO2-e / t ROM.* There is no analysis or reporting provided that demonstrates why Ulan Mine has a much lower emissions intensity than neighbouring coal mines or why baseline emissions were reduced from 123,668 CO2-e to below 100,000 CO2-e after 2014.

CWEC considers that Ulan Mine total GHG is under reported. The proposal does not nominate emissions reduction goals and is not consistent with NSW Government goals under the *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023.* The proposal also fails to meet the NSW EPA Guide for Large Emitters.

Not a Modification

CWEC strongly objects to the proposal being determined under the modification planning pathway. This is a large new mine, in a new area wholly outside the existing mine boundary and must be rigorously assessed as such. The lack of independent oversight in the determination of a modification denies further public scrutiny beyond this public exhibition period.

The proposal is not substantially the same as the current Ulan West Operations consolidated approval. The proposal is larger in area and coal production than the

[3] Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Management Plan (AQ&GHGMP)

proposed Moolarben Open Cut 3 expansion which is being assessed as a new project and subject to merits scrutiny by the Independent Planning Commission.

The proposal has multiple additional impacts that are substantially different from the current approval because of the scale of the expansion.

The proposal must be subject to the rigorous assessment and determination requirements of a new project.

Ulan Mod 6 considerations

The Land and Environment Court order made on Friday 14 November to set aside the approval of the Ulan Modification 6 project has direct implications for the proposal.

The current approval now maintains a mine completion date of 2033. The proposal is to continue mining from 2035 to 2041. This is no longer valid.

The proposal is also directly connected to new longwall panels in the Modification 6 project area that are no longer approved.

The proposal must be rejected on the grounds that it no longer has relevant connection to the approved Ulan West Operations.

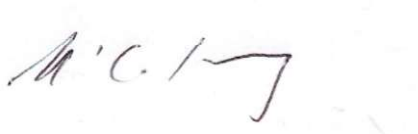
Conclusion

The proposal will have significant cumulative economic, environmental, cultural and social impacts. It should not be assessed as a Modification because it is substantially different from the existing approved operations and impacts. The limited modification assessment process has not identified key cumulative impacts or fully assessed a new area of proposed disturbance outside the current mining lease.

The setting aside of the Ulan Modification 6 approval has rendered the proposal invalid. It must be withdrawn and if the opportunity arises resubmitted as a new project to undergo full independent and transparent assessment.

For more information about this submission contact:
environmentcouncilcentralwest@gmail.com

Yours sincerely,



Nick King
President