

SUBMISSION TO MINING AND INDUSTRY PROJECTS
NSW DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Bathurst Community Climate Action Network (BCCAN)

Part 3A Modification 4 - Invincible Mine Extension (07-0127 MOD 4)

Part 3A Modification 2 - Cullen Valley Mine Extension (DA 200-5-2003 MOD 2)

The Bathurst Community Climate Action Network (BCCAN) is opposed to any further expansion of the coal industry in the Central West and urges the government instead to create a State Conservation Area on the site of the current Ben Bullen State Forest to protect the high conservation values of the area, to serve the recreational needs of the expanding population in western Sydney, the Blue Mountains and the Central West, and to create sustainable local employment.

BCCAN objects to the mining in the Ben Bullen State Forest for the following reasons. Ben Bullen State Forest is publically owned land set aside for the harvesting of a renewable resource (timber). The recently modified proposal threatens a section of State Forest public land which is part of the proposed Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area. It sets a disturbing precedent as, if approved, it is difficult to see how similar mining applications in the State Forest could be rejected in future.

The mine threatens the outstanding geology and the habitat of a number of species including the lyrebird, the Regent Honeyeater, the Tiger Quoll and the Powerful Owl. There is no way that Coalpac would be capable of restoring this habitat. The biodiversity offsets are inadequate and cannot replace the unique biodiversity, landscape and geological values of the pagoda landform. The damage will be permanent. This permanent environmental destruction will be all for the sake of a short-term economic gain.

The proposed open cut is close to very sensitive topography of iconic stone pagodas and sandstone cliffs, under which it is proposed to high-wall mine. A small surface buffer zone around the pagodas and sandstone cliffs cannot guarantee that the effects of mining will be confined to the open cut itself.

The proposed mine will affect watercourses, fracture aquifers, block and pollute surface and groundwater, adding to salinity and pollution downstream in the Turon and Macquarie Rivers. Not only would this have costs to native species dependent on the water quality, but could have permanent implications for agriculture downstream and for communities which draw up on the Macquarie.

We note the EPA and the Department of Health have raised serious concerns about the noise and health impacts of the proposed mine. A mine should not be considered this close to rural communities with nearby school and residences. The impact on the Cullen Bullen community would be devastating. There are a number of precedents of ghost towns near coal mines in the Hunter Valley and Queensland where noise, dust, water and light pollution 24/7 have forced residents to move. The strong westerly winds of late winter-early spring will carry dust from the mine onto forested areas and into the nearby Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, to cloak these areas and impact wildlife and habitat further.

Recently a group of BCCAN members visited parts of the Newnes Plateau & the eastern perimeter of the Ben Bullen State Forest which had been undermined by long-wall coal mines. We noted numbers of drained swamps, the dessication of a

major Indigenous occupation and art site, Mayinygu Marragu, substantial cracking across beautiful sandstone features and shearing off of cliff faces in a number of places. (See included photos) We did not see, but were informed about, substantial contamination of creeks fed from the run-off from the mines. This can never be rehabilitated and the damage is unavoidable. Off-setting does not avoid the permanent damage.

Viewing the damage caused by underground mining in this area makes us sceptical of the value of environmental consultants' predictions about the impact open cut mining on the surrounding area's ecology and the capacity of the government to ensure that undertakings by mining companies will be honoured. Past breaches of environmental regulations at the Invincible Colliery are further evidence of the likelihood that large coal companies may breach the conditions of their mining approvals.

However, equally important is the long term impact that this policy of burning fossil fuel will have on biodiversity over future generations through contributing to climate change. If, indeed, the Mount Piper and Wallerawang power stations are running out of local sources of coal this must be a good time to rapidly phase in a move to renewable sources of energy and explore means of energy efficiency. At a national level, wind, solar, geothermal, wave and tidal energy have the potential to fill any vacuum caused by the scaling down of the burning of fossil fuel.

The Central West is not a quarry. The coal industry juggernaut does not have the right to destroy the finest sections of our local environment and jeopardise the future climate of our grandchildren. This is a good place and time to call a stop to the unfettered expansion of coal.

The coal industry is heavily indirectly subsidised and the economic benefits are often over- stated and short term whereas the costs are long term since most of the damage is irremediable.

(Too much of a good thing? The macroeconomic case for slowing down the mining boom. Richard Dennis and Matt Grudnoff Policy Brief No 37, March 2012 The Australia Institute.)

The supply of low ash coal from the Lithgow seam is finite and those companies which presently depend upon it will inevitably have to transition to other energy sources. We note the recent observations by Professor Tim Flannery that Investment in renewable energy has increased six fold since 2004 and for the first time businesses around the world are investing more in renewables than coal, oil, and gas. In many parts of Australia solar and wind energy have reached 'grid parity' and are more cost effective than fossil fuels (Sydney Morning Herald, 14/8/2012). If mines like this are approved Australia will be trapped in the energy economy of the twentieth century and transition will be made even harder.

To conclude, the devastating damage being done by mining in the Hunter Valley surely proves that open cut mining is just not to be tolerated by Australians. The licence to proceed with the devastation of close to 315 hectares of timbered land next to the village of Cullen Bullen should not be countenanced by us, since we are responsible to pass this land on to our descendants in the best possible condition. Restoration of what now exists in Ben Bullen State Forest is obviously impossible. One hundred year old, two hundred year-old trees cannot be replaced, nor the topsoil that has taken aeons to form. You cannot replace a stream of pure clean water if you collapse its base. You destroy the flora and fauna and damage magnificent sandstone outcrops forever.

This is what will occur to the environment if mining is approved, and that is without considering the dangers to the health of nearby residents and the complete destruction of their particular lifestyles. This is not a time for figures and statistics. This is a time for emotion, forethought and foresight. We share the views of Mr Ian Kiernan 'As a species we have a finite time on the planet and have a responsibility to leave it in as good a shape as we found it or better.' However if this project is approved it will sadly demonstrate that 'We have the attitude that we are some kind of supreme being and we own the earth.' Western Advocate August 22, 2012.