



Submission Ulan Coal MOD 4

This submission DOES NOT SUPPORT the expansion of the Ulan Coal Mine MOD 4.

My name is Melissa Gray from Dubbo NSW, I am a Healthy Rivers Ambassador for the Macquarie and Castlereagh Rivers and their tributaries. Fresh water and rivers are vital to existence, and it is essential that as a society we accept our role as custodians of this landscape for future generations.

Since the 1980's Ulan Coal mine has been extracting up to 23 million litres of ground water a day across the headwaters of the Goulburn River. If approved, the proposal by Ulan Coal Mine to expand underground mining either side of the Great Dividing Range would not only continue to cause damage to the Goulburn River and threaten The Drip Gorge, but will also drain base flows to the Talbragar River and intercept a large volume of water from the NSW Murray-Darling Porous Rock Groundwater Source.

The proposed expansion of Ulan coal mine would further threaten regional groundwater sources to the north of the iconic natural landscape feature known as The Drip. The Drip must be protected, therefore further depletion to groundwater sources in this area is not acceptable.

The cumulative damage to the Goulburn River is now very evident with two additional neighbouring mines, Moolarben and Wilpinjong adding to the impact of the Ulan coal mine. The river stopped flowing over the summer period despite large storm events and smaller nearby creeks continuing to flow. The cumulative regional impact of mining on the health and integrity of the Goulburn River has not been assessed. Under this proposed expansion, even more base flows to the Goulburn River will be intercepted. The continued expansion of the three mines mentioned above cannot be permitted before the establishment of a rigorous and independent Regional Water Study.

Expanding underground mining to the western side of the Great Dividing Range will impact on surface and groundwater in the Murray-Darling Basin. There are already massive issues with water management, compliance and alleged water theft in the Northern Murray-Darling Basin. Vast quantities of surface water in the Northern Murray Darling Basin that are withheld on farm through floodplain harvesting have been unmeasured to this point, with effort to account for these volumes only just being started by NSW DPI. A full audit of water sources in the Northern Murray-Darling Basin is required, further extractions must be restricted under these conditions.

Base flows to the Talbragar River will be intercepted by the expansion of the Ulan coal mine. Such reductions in base flows will have concerning impacts on downstream Aboriginal cultures and economies, communities, floodplain graziers and recreational fishers – in other words, the community at large. All of nature with its wildlife and fauna, and all communities with their economies, cultures, social and recreational activities in the Murray-Darling Basin need healthy resilient rivers to survive. Our rivers are our Lifeblood.

As a tributary of the Macquarie River, the Talbragar River is an important contributor of supplementary water to the Macquarie system and therefore the Macquarie Marshes. The Macquarie Marshes are listed as a key biodiversity area IN DANGER in BirdLife Australia's "KBAS IN DANGER The State Of Australia's Key Biodiversity Areas in 2017" report. The Macquarie Marshes are subject to international agreements, including the Ramsar Convention, which compel Australia to protect the Marshes as an important migratory bird habitat under the Water Act 2007. A notification of change to ecological character of the Macquarie Marshes was submitted to the Ramsar secretariat under Article 3.2 of the Ramsar Convention in 2009. Recovery of water for the Marshes is one of the key requirements for restoring ecological character.

The Macquarie Marshes Ramsar listing includes Criterion 8: Food source, nursery or migration path for fish. The Macquarie River catchment supports a number of threatened fish species including Silver perch *Bidyanus bidyanus* (vulnerable on IUCN Red List), Murray Cod *Maccullochella peelii* (vulnerable under Federal Environment Law (EPBC Act), freshwater catfish *Tandanus tandanus* (endangered population in Murray-Darling Basin NSW Fisheries Act).

The lower Macquarie catchment, including the Marshes, is located in the area covered by the endangered ecological community listed under the NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994 as the 'aquatic ecological community in the natural drainage system of the lowland catchment of the Darling River'. This community covers all native fish and aquatic invertebrates and the natural rivers, creeks, lagoons, billabongs, wetlands, lakes, tributaries, anabranches and effluents in which they live.

Any further diversion to base flows into the Macquarie Valley system would contribute to the risk of a failure to meet the objectives of the Basin Plan Environmental Watering Strategy.

The communities of the Macquarie Valley have shown strong concern for river health. There are strong Landcare, Field Naturalists, Bushcare and recreational fishing groups on the Macquarie River who work selflessly and tirelessly to improve the condition of the Macquarie River, with impressive results. It has been shown at local events in Dubbo, including a Healthy Rivers Roadshow public meeting in September 2017 that community concern for river health is strong.

Extracting and burning coal for power increases the very dangerous impacts of climate change. These impacts are well documented, and public attitude has strongly shifted to supporting a future powered by renewable energy.

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