



Goulburn River Stone Cottages

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This is an objection to Ulan Coal Mines Mod 4

This underground mine expansion will further threaten regional groundwater sources to the north of The Drip gorge and reduce base flows to the Goulburn River. Our farm stay tourism business is downstream and depends on a viable river as does the whole of our family's future life here. The cumulative regional impact of mining on the health and integrity of the Goulburn River has not been assessed. The ongoing drawdown and interception of regional groundwater that supports base flow in the river and reports to the iconic natural landscape feature known as The Drip, cannot continue.

This proposed expansion will be yet another addition to historical cumulative losses of surface and groundwater due to reckless expansions of coal mining, ongoing since the 1980s and reflecting a narrow focus with short-term priorities. A landscape without water is effectively sterilised for everything other than short term land use.

There has been a pattern here of ill-informed decisions by the State Planning Department, decisions always in favour of the mining companies and at great cost to local residents and downstream water users. Since the 1980s I have witnessed the resultant degradation of this irreplaceable river. The drawdown of groundwater and interception of surface flows over a large area of the river catchment has impacted on essential base flows that sustain the Goulburn River. This water loss has caused the Goulburn River to become highly dependent on the discharge of treated mine water that has roughly doubled the salt levels compared to pre-mining levels.

Conditions of approval should have a water plan that guarantees environmental flows, and based on pre-mining water quality. Good quality water discharge from Ulan, Moolarben and Wilpinjong mines into the Goulburn River must be regulated under a set of environmental flow rules that mimic natural flows. To be effective these rules need to be consistent between the three mines in this area.

It is puzzling that although justification for these mining expansion approvals rests largely on the wealth claimed to be generated; when it comes to monitoring the conditions of approval, there are no funds for independent scrutiny. Instead the interpretation and reporting of the actual downstream results from these expansions is solely reliant on the unpaid vigilance of members of the public and community organisations such as Mudgee District Environment Group. The cumulative damage to the river is now very evident with two additional neighbouring mines, Moolarben and Wilpinjong. All three mines continue to expand in the absence of an independent regional water study.

I do not support mining under the Durridgere State Conservation Area as proposed, nor do I support putting Aboriginal heritage rock shelter sites at risk from subsidence and cliff collapse. Elder Mr Dave Maynard said all that needs to be said on this when speaking with great feeling against a previous mining expansion... "you already have taken so much..."

Not only is business as usual and ever-expanding coal extraction putting at risk our rich Aboriginal heritage and permanently degrading our irreplaceable river system, the negative impacts go much further. Additional extraction of coal will increase the impacts of catastrophic climate change. The evidence based warnings are clear and irrefutable; we must urgently take action to avoid the existential threat of human induced climate change. It is a reckless dereliction of Government regulators' duty of care to approve the extraction of any more coal reserves¹. Further Government approvals give a false sense of security, encouraging those economically dependent on coal mining to carry on; to take on debt and make unrealistic long term plans for their families. There needs to be a clearly defined strategy to manage an orderly slow down and equitable closure of fossil fuel mining. The danger is that coal mining may abruptly cease, probably sooner than most people think. Many in the Mudgee region are at risk of suffering ruinous consequences. We cannot go on ignoring the evidence and pretending we can keep mining fossil fuels without consequence. Permanent environmental damage cannot be minimised or offset, nor can real consequences be outweighed by chanting the mantra 'jobs, jobs, jobs'. As an energy fuel, coal is economically uncompetitive, technologically outdated and socially is no longer acceptable. Coal mining and a safe sustainable future for our society are mutually exclusive.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Imrie.

¹ Ian Dunlop 'Climate Change: The fiduciary responsibility of politicians & bureaucrats' 26 April 2018
<https://reneweconomy.com.au/climate-change-fiduciary-responsibility-politicians-bureaucrats-59891/>