5 September 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission – Wallarah 2 Coal Project

The above application should be rejected for the reasons outlined in this submission.

Water under threat

In 2013, 500 scientists from around the world warned that **the majority of the 9 billion people on Earth will live with severe pressure on fresh water within the space of two generations** as climate change, pollution and over-use of resources take their toll. "There is no citizen of the world who can be complacent about this," said Janos Bogardi, former director of the UN University's Institute for Environment and Human Security.[i]

Moreover, recently the national science agency CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology released a report which predicts that, if we maintain the status quo, temperature rises of up to 5.1C in Australia by 2090 - and that these will create **water resource challenges**.[ii]

In fact, there is an **overwhelming body of evidence, which shows that water scarcity will become a major issue in the future**.

If this proposal is accepted, there is a real risk of water loss.

It is highly unreasonable to risk our precious water resources for the sake of short-term profit.

Need to Exercise Precautionary Principle

Moreover, decision-makers should apply the well-established precautionary principle, that where the health of humans and the environment are at stake, the burden of proof that it is not harmful falls on those carrying out an action).

When things go wrong

Time and time again we see what happens when things go wrong with mining activities – the responsible company often goes into liquidation or might pay a nominal amount of compensation, with the public purse footing the remainder of the bill.

A case on point was the large spill of a chemicals used to remove impurities from coal in West Virginia in January 2014. The spill contaminated a river less than a mile upstream of the intake for the state's largest drinking water treatment plant. As many as 300,000 West Virginia residents in nine counties were told not to bathe, cook or wash clothes using their tap water.[iii] Months on, some residents were still unable to drink their tap water. Shortly after, the company responsible for the spill went into liquidation and paid only a small amount of compensation during bankruptcy proceedings.[iv]

We also need to ask how people will get their water if something does go wrong with these mining activities. Sydney's desalination plant is currently switched off and we'll have to pay the foreign owners of the plant a restart fee of $5.5 million.[v] In any event, Sydney's desalination plant only delivers water to Erskinville, which then mainly feeds Sydney's Eastern Suburbs.

If something goes wrong, aside from those people directly affected, we will all also end up having to help foot the bill.

Rehabilitation and Remedial Work

Given the way that mining companies are currently finding ways to avoid their rehabilitation responsibilities, the approval of this mine increases the likelihood of taxpayers picking up at least part of the tab.

A significant issue at the moment is mining companies avoiding their rehabilitation responsibilities in a range of ways including on-selling the mines to small, relatively unknown players or by declaring bankruptcy.

The need for adequate rehabilitation and remedial work for mines in our water catchment areas cannot be understated. This is water our communities are reliant on.

When assessing this application, the question must be asked what happens when mining companies avoid their rehabilitation and remediation responsibilities?

The price of coal appears to be in structural decline, and very few coal mines are even breaking even at present. Why would we take these risks?

Commercially risky to allow mining in our drinking water catchment

It is frankly difficult to comprehend that anyone would allow this to be done in their water catchment area. Why would we possibly want to take this risk with the public's water assets – the assets of our present and future generations? The risks are risks the public cannot walk away with. We are stuck with the consequences of the decision here.

Moreover, we live in the driest continent on earth. This is a risk not worth taking.

When and where do we stop?

There has to be a point when we stop. We are at the point where we need to say enough is enough, and disallow the activity.

On a personal level

On a personal level, it causes me deep concern that mining is taking place in drinking water catchments. I don't understand why people would consider it acceptable to mine in our drinking water catchment, to pose risks to our water and to make such commercially risky decisions.

I simply can't understand why we would put our water supply – and future generations – in jeopardy for short-term profit.

Yours faithfully,

[Name withheld]

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[i] http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/may/24/global-majority-water-shortages-two-generations

[ii] http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jan/26/climate-change-will-hit-australia-harder-than-rest-of-world-study-shows

[iii] http://ecowatch.com/2014/01/10/west-virginia-coal-chemical-spill/

[iv] http://money.cnn.com/2014/01/17/news/companies/freedom-industries-bankruptcy/

[v] http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-27/nsw-desalination-plant-deal-costing-customers-10-billion/4985168