

I am very concerned by and oppose this proposed sand mine and backfill tip.

I am a grandson of the original owners of the neighbouring property 'Danellen', (Eugene and Maureen Fitzpatrick) and have spent all my childhood on that property. I now have four young sons and regularly visit to get away from Sydney. There is an enormous amount of family history and work invested in the orchards, gardens and buildings at Danellen. The proposed sand mine will destroy this and quite honestly it is, at a personal level, devastating for me. I have looked forward to my kids spending a lot of time there over the coming years, as I did.

In this context, the suggestion of a 4m wall as an appropriate screen to 300 truck movements a day just 60m from the family homestead built on our property is insulting. The proponent knows that this mine will make our property unlivable but blithely suggested that we could move to a nearby house of theirs. Backed by their army of 'independent' consultants they make a sanitised case that our noise levels will be manageable and that it doesn't really matter anyway as we are only 'weekenders'. Our family has been living at Danellen for forty-five years! A 100 decibel truck at 60 metres is 70dB at our kitchen window. A concrete barricade to wall us in and completely block our views only reduces sound by 5-10dB. Every 5 minutes 24/7! And that's not to mention the dust and toxins that will pollute our property. There's little chance that the proponent miner (from Woollahra) would live next to such a development without objection. Just imagine the shrill uproar!

There is also something fundamentally unfair about having so little opportunity to respond to documentation that the proponent has produced over a decade and who has made such a ham-fisted approach to consulting the community. We were first told of this proposal on February 16, 2018 and given a week to "consult" with Corkery.

The EIS put forward is contradictory, ambiguous and patently self-serving in respect of many critical risks arising from this proposal. Standing back from the barrage of jargon and pseudo-scientific studies, what is plain is that:

1. This is one of the largest sand mines in Australia. A 47 hectare pit to a depth of 39 metres below the current water table. Is going to have an irreversible effect on the bores on which so many locals depend for agriculture and life. And it is only going to increase in size as neighbouring properties 'give up' in the face of the destruction.
2. Removing the sandstone and its critical biological role in filtering water, and then dumping 8 million cubic metres of Sydney fill into the pit is just madness. VENM will not filter the water the way the sandstone currently does and will itself significantly increase the sediment levels into Sydney's water supply. And in reality, it won't be VENM. It will be landfill. The scant detail on remediation and fill in the EIS, and the fact that the proponent in part comprises the interests of a tipping company, almost assures that this is what is intended and will eventuate if permitted.

3. The mining will pollute and damage with dust Long Swamp and its aquifer which clean and supply Sydney's Nepean water catchment by overflow and leaching mud and finings from the pit.
4. The real risk of adverse health effects of airborne dust (asthma, silicosis, fibrosis, cancer) carried by prevailing winds across the population centres of the Highlands, which appear to be expanding rapidly, has not been properly considered in this EIS. There are alternative, less populous areas from which to source sand. This use of private land is an opportunistic cash grab, made with disregard for the health of the community.
5. Property values in the area will plummet, and the lives of neighbours will be severely disrupted without compensation or redress. All for the supposed positive impact of '20 jobs' (which as you would expect is likely to be an overestimate). Measured against the profits that will be realized for the proponent (billions) this positive impact is laughable.
6. Land clearing 63 hectares of native bush to narrow critically the most fragile section of the Great Western Wildlife Corridor, seriously harming the native flora and fauna, including endangered species.
7. The wider effects of noise, blasting and light pollution 24/7 for 30 years will destroy this critical habitat.
8. The peace and tranquillity at The Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy - Penrose Park, which attracts 10,000 national and international tourists and pilgrims a year will be irreversible.
9. There will be a significant increase in heavy trucking on the Hume Highway (300 - 400 trucks a day). The close proximity of this mine to the highway is a significant drawback. Expect accidents to increase significantly as a result.
10. It is unacceptable that privately owned land can be developed in this way to the complete detriment of neighbouring properties and the environment with such a minimal opportunity to debate, scrutinize and consider more appropriate alternative proposals for sourcing sand.
11. The planning process, in this instance, is being 'gamed'. This is likely an opening 'high-bid', made in expectation that the review panel will, in the current political climate (construction boom and upcoming election) seize on this proposal as an easy 'fix' to a 'sand-shortage' that, in the views of the powerful vested interests of Sydney's developers, threatens their pre-eminent position.

Taking a broader perspective, it is also appalling that privately owned land can be developed in this way to the complete detriment of neighbouring properties and with such a minimal opportunity to debate, scrutinize and consider appropriate alternatives to this proposal.

I am a lawyer by profession and from a legal perspective, I am concerned by the lack of visibility in relation to the leasing arrangements the proponent must have in place, and as to the proponent's dealings with Crown Lands Department in relation to use of the road reserve, which had been in the process of being sold to the adjacent landholders when the proponent stepped in and appears to have stopped it. More generally, there seems to be a fundamental unfairness in allowing one owner the right to mine their land to the severe detriment of the local community. The lack of any substantive 'consultation' process and the misleading description of this project as a 'quarry' rather than a 'mine' is also very concerning.

To re-iterate, we are well aware of the vested interests that are demanding sand to fuel Sydney's construction boom that has to accommodate Sydney's burgeoning population and "wealth", but there is no good reason why this particular proposal should be approved to proceed. It is lazy planning for an area that critically needs to sustain its environment, particularly its water and air quality, to properly accommodate and grow sustainably into the future. Consider also that before the end of this project (claimed to be 2063) this mine and the huge Green Valley mine just 4km away will be within Sydney's borders – if we make it that far.

Proper consideration needs to be given to alternative location(s) for sourcing sand, and there are many, rather than latching on to this proposal and a short-sighted 'private' fix. Sydney will grow at the Southern Highlands expense, with devastated water supply, significant health risks and happy in the knowledge it has been earmarked for Sydney's tip. What a great opportunity!!! And face it, the real money is in the tipping, not the sand. Three times as much. The project only went big when the garbage company Hi-Quality joined with the miner Tulla. Hi-Quality wants the hole.

In conclusion - to allow this proposal to proceed would be madness. There are alternative locations for a sand mine likely to have far less impacts than this proposal and they should be studied and assessed carefully and pro-actively by government. To be responding passively in the way this proponent is cynically inviting the Government to do, is a recipe for an environmental disaster.