

Objection to the Proposed Sutton Forest Sand Mine

I live on a family-owned property in the Southern Highlands. It has been in the family now for over 70 years, and my children and grandchildren show no signs of ever wanting to part with it. Do we make a lot of money out of it? No – any income comes from off-farm work. It is important to us because of the bush and the wildlife, the preservation of which is our utmost concern. The property, 'Karalinga', forms a significant part of the **Great Western Wildlife Corridor** at its northern end, contributing over 900 hectares to this crucial link between the Southern Blue Mountains and Morton National Parks. Lying between Bullio and Bungonia, the Great Western Wildlife Corridor is the only vegetated habitat between these two nationally important areas of conservation.

'Karalinga' falls within the Wingecarribee Shire Council's E3 zoning category, as also does the land on which Sutton Forest Quarries Pty Ltd proposes to develop a huge sand mine by clearing 63 hectares of native bush and then digging down into the sandstone rock over an area of 47 hectares, to a depth of 39 metres below the current water table. Their absolution for committing this travesty comes in the way of Biodiversity Offsets – the benefits of which seem to be of dubious value. There are legitimate concerns about the quarry regarding its compatibility with the objectives of the Council's E3 Environmental Management Zone.

E3 Environmental Management Zone

The provisions of the E3 Environmental Management Zone are:

- To protect, manage and restore areas with special ecological, scientific, cultural or aesthetic values
- To provide for a limited range of development that does not have an adverse effect on those values.
- To encourage the retention of the remaining evidence of significant historic and social values expressed in existing landscape and land use patterns.
- To minimise the proliferation of buildings and other structures in these sensitive landscape areas.
- To provide for a restricted range of development and land use activities that provide for rural settlement, sustainable agriculture, other types of economic and employment development, recreation and community amenity in identified drinking water catchment areas.
- To protect significant agricultural resources (soil, water and vegetation) in recognition of their value to Wingecarribee's longer term economic sustainability

The proposed development would result in a land use that is inconsistent with the ecological and aesthetic values of the area and would fail to protect agricultural resources due to its impacts on the soil, water and native vegetation. It is therefore inconsistent with the objectives of the E3 Environmental Management Zone within which it lies.

Disruption of Habitat

Disruption of wildlife habitat will go far beyond the area to be cleared. The noise generated by blasting and heavy truck movements will inevitably have a deleterious effect on many species that are already vulnerable. Nocturnal species, while not normally active during the daytime, will not be able to co-exist within earshot of the quarry operations, as their sleep patterns will be constantly disturbed. Studies have also shown that the noise and vibration generated by off-road vehicles act as a stressor, and that wildlife, including birds, reptiles

and large mammals respond to such disturbance with accelerated heart-rate and metabolic function leading to increased stress and modified behaviour. Koalas and Glossy Black Cockatoos are only two notable examples of the many vulnerable species known to occur in areas within the Great Western Wildlife Corridor. We need to do more to protect and increase their habitat, not destroy it.

Biodiversity Offsets

The recently established Biodiversity Offsets Scheme seems to bring as many problems with it as it does benefits. It almost seems like a kind of bribery. I am aware that many people who are very concerned about conservation are also reluctant to take advantage of the offer of payment for biodiversity credits which can then be sold on to developers to offset the impacts of development occurring elsewhere. This is highlighted in the instance of Sutton Forest Quarries Pty Ltd, whose owners are apparently confident that by buying up biodiversity credits they will be able to offset the environmental mess of their proposed sand mine, seemingly unaware, or at least uncaring, of the distress it will cause to the lives of their neighbours in the Sutton Forest area or to the damage it will cause to the Great Western Wildlife Corridor, which is of great concern to my family and to many of our neighbours. Needless to say, for these reasons I have a very strong objection to the proposed development going ahead.

Should the NSW Department of Planning and Environment deem the Sutton Forest quarry to be of such significance to the people of New South Wales that it should override both the provisions of Wingecarribee Shire Council's E3 Environmental Management Zone and the efforts of the recently established Biodiversity Conservation Trust to protect and conserve biodiversity on private land, then surely offsets at least equivalent to those paid for biodiversity assets should be paid to all those residents of Sutton Forest who have invested their life's efforts in an environment they had every reason to believe would be quiet, calm and peaceful.

Furthermore, is not the preservation, and indeed the consolidation, of the Great Western Wildlife Corridor at least as significant for our long-term national interest as is the development of the Sutton Forest Sand Mine? To repair the damage that would be inflicted on it by the proposed mine is probably beyond the realms of possibility.

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