



mudgee district  
environment group



**Presentation from Mudgee District Environment Group  
To the Independent Planning Commission Panel  
Moolarben Coal Project stage 1 Mod 14 Stage 2 Mod 3**

Tuesday April 2019  
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**Part 1. Introduction and Background:**

50k's north of Mudgee just off the Ulan Rd on the Goulburn River is the Great Dripping Wall. Locals affectionately call it "The Drip".

Impacts on this amazing place by Moolarben Coal project is the key focus of this presentation.

**The Landscape Heritage Conservation Committee NATIONAL TRUST REGISTER LISTING REPORT, July 2013, describes this area in the following way:**

"The Drip and Corner Gorges on the Goulburn River form part of a visually dramatic landscape of sandstone cliffs and gorges located on the western-most edge of the Hunter River Network. The sculptural rock and ironstone formations drip clear spring water which seeps from a perched aquifer through a porous rock wall supporting ferns, bottlebrushes and weeping grasses. The atmosphere of The Drip is described as having a cathedral-like quality.

It goes on to quote that: "In 2007 the *Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel* reflecting public and government concerns about the potential impact of commercial mining on The Drip and Corner Gorge "concluded that significant cultural, spiritual, historical, educational, tourism and recreational values were associated with" The Drip and Corner Gorge and these features should be protected."

They emphasised that: "Official protection and recognition of the Drip and Corner Gorges and riparian corridor along the Goulburn River has the support of the Aboriginal Cultural Environment Network (ACEN), the Hunter Central Rivers CMA, Mid-Western Regional Council, Mudgee District Environment Group, Central West Environment Network, the NSW Government's Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel (for the Moolarben Coal Project) and the local community."

Where will these extra 10 billion litres of water originate from? At this stage no one knows!

There is a potential that the increased volume of water now predicted to flow into the underground mine will come from the regional groundwater source that feeds The Drip.

This additional water is significant (**10 billion litres per day**) and must be assessed for environmental impact.

This point is important because there could be even greater inflows to the underground 4 mine than the updated model has predicted:

The lack of assessment of where the additional inflows into underground 4, as found in the updated groundwater model - is a significant issue and is very relevant to the Commission's decision making process.

The new model has problems as there haven't been any changes in key assumptions. The original water model assessment for underground 4 was not adequate. Under the new information in the updated groundwater model grave concerns for the Goulburn River and The Drip are apparent

Further assessment of the source of this additional water is needed.

**Secondly:** the wording in the Moolarben Assessment Report from the Department of Planning is incorrect... on Page 41 Table 9 the report states that the Stage 1 approval requires no greater than "**Negligible** impacts on groundwater supply to The Drip". The conditions in fact read **Nil Impacts**.

**The Conditions of approval for stage 2:** Application Number: 08\_0135 Proponent: Moolarben Coal Mines Pty Ltd Approval Authority: Minister for Planning Land: See Appendix 1 Project: Moolarben Coal Project Stage 2 Pages 14 to 17 includes the condition that there be: "**Nil impact on the water supply to the Drip**"

In 2017 letters were sent to Hon. Gabrielle Upton the then Minister for the Environment and Heritage and Richard Kingston the then acting Director of Conservation Branch Park Programs NPWS concerning detrimental impacts on the water at the Drip by mining activities.

**MDEG received a letter in November 2017 from Todd Duffy Senior Team Leader, Reserve Establishment National Parks and Wildlife Service** saying:

"The consent for Moolarben Coal (05\_0117 Modification 3) requires the monitoring of groundwater flows and any other measures to ensure "**nil impact or environmental consequences**" on The Drip." And added: "The enforcement of these conditions is a matter for the consent authority, the Department of Planning and Environment."

### **In Conclusion:**

It is our considered opinion that the Independent Planning Commission should recommend that because this project, as well as underground 4, cannot meet the 'nil' impact condition:

- This project should not be approved
- Also the environmental impact of Underground Mine 4 must be reassessed.
- Meanwhile approval for underground 4 needs to be withdrawn and no work proceed until an adequate independent assessment of the impacts on The Drip is fulfilled.

### **Other issues of Concern on The Drip and the Goulburn River:**

- The Reverse Osmosis Plant – in January 2018 the existing Ulan Coal Osmosis plant broke down and the river ran dry. Nothing was done until there was media attention and locals complained. One of the continuing problems is the lack of adequate monitoring by the relevant government agency.
- Increase in discharge to Goulburn River – Salinity will still be a key issue even with the reduction from 900EC's to 685EC's. MDEG has received expert advice that 500EC's would be better to the health of the river.
- Effective EPA monitoring is dependent on Government providing adequate resources. This is not evidenced by the current government allocations.
- The Study of water Quality - needs to be done prior to a decision being made
- The quality of the Brine Management Plan is unknown. This must be done and evaluated before a decision is made
- The Drip Agreement does not protect The Drip as it will be a State Conservation Area with continuing mining activity i.e. tunnels under the river and mining to the north. All of which casts serious doubt o the government's commitment to Nil impacts.
- There are concerns about the Cumulative Impacts of three large mines on the health of the Goulburn River.