

To whom it may concern, I object to the Russell Vale Underground Expansion Project for the following reasons:

Wollongong Coal is not a fit and proper entity. Promised socio-economic benefits are unlikely to materialise as Wollongong Coal is insolvent, carrying a billion dollars in debt and has not paid any company tax since 2013. Wollongong Coal are unreliable operators - they cannot operate the only other mine they own in NSW at Wongawilli safely. They were forced to cease mining at Wongawilli in 2019 - with huge job losses when the Resources Regulator found it was not safe for workers. Wollongong Coal have a history of non-compliance such as the failure to realign and perform flood mitigation works on Bellambi Gully Creek. In 1998, residents downstream were inundated by coal pollution and run-off due to flooding. Further examples of non-compliance include failing to build sound walls and over-stockpiling of coal.

The pit top area where the coal is extracted and loaded is the closest colliery to a residential area in Australia. This will create significant pollution in the form of microparticle dust and heavy metals exacerbating respiratory and other health conditions of local residents and creating significant noise pollution due to frequent truck movements.

The economic return of the mine would only create 205 jobs, which would represent 0.15% of the employed labour force in the Illawarra at peak of production. Furthermore, the coal mined from Russell Vale has been exported, none has been used in local steel production at Port Kembla.

Operation of the mine means the closing of the escarpment hiking/biking tracks and exclusion of both local residents and tourists from enjoying the natural environment and bush land.

Mining within the special area of the catchment for greater Sydney causes significant geological and ecological damage, as well as continued drinking water loss. I refer the panel to Figure 9 of page 55 of Part 2 of the report by Independent Panel for Mining in the Catchment showing hydrographic evidence of swamps areas directly above mined coal seams can no longer retain surface water which would otherwise run off into the catchments. This is undeniable evidence that mining in the special area is compromising the water supply of greater Sydney. I also refer to the panel to Open Letter to the Premier of NSW Regarding Coal Mining in the Schedule 1 Special Areas of the Sydney Drinking Water Catchment by 20 scientists, including chemists, geologists and hydrologists, which states that WaterNSW suggests the possibility that an average of 25 million litres a day of streamflow may be being diverted and lost from the reservoirs, because of coal mining in the Special areas. Referring to the 2018 WaterNSW scoping study and noting uncertain or unknown losses of groundwater supply to the reservoirs and uncertain or unknown leakage rates, the total loss rate could conceivably be greater than 25 ML/d. That is, drinking water losses could be between 2.5 and 9 billion litres a year, or more. By allowing Wollongong Coal to expand their project within the Special Area would contribute to further losses of drinking water for Sydney residents.

In the light of the reasons outlined above, the proposed Russell Vale UEP is not in the public interest. I ask that you reject this application from Wollongong Coal and recommend a process to close the mine at Russell Vale permanently.

Dr Edwin Clatworthy