I am horrified by Government official’s, mining companies’ and Council’s lackadaisical attitude towards  cleaning up after mining, extension of mining and general observation and care of the landscape along the escarpment. I am concerned that a major mistake could occur at Russell Vale and beg that my, and many other’s objections be taken into account.

When I moved to Wollongong in early 1973 I fell in love with the escarpment and bought a house in Foothills Road, Austinmer. Early in the year we had quite a large earth quake and were worried about the house but after a check by an engineer we were assured all was safe. Within a few months bulldozers set to work clearing rainforest vegetation and shifting soil to open up a large block alongside us, for a new development. In the process of doing this they shifted the creek bed to give themselves another block, blasting rock and creating rapid flow. Immediately our house shifted in the rainforest soil, 9 inches in one weekend.

We were advised that it could have involved subsidence from old mines as well as the shock effect of the blasting and of course from the redirection of water down the hillside. The Mayor of Wollongong, John Parker, visited with some of his experts, to express his sorrow that they could do nothing about the problem. One of his experts swung around a pole holding up our back verandah, to his shock we shouted at him not to put pressure on anything. He apologized in amazement at the thought that we were afraid the house could fall. Mines informed us that unless the whole house sank, I’m not sure how much but think it may have been a metre, they could not say that it was mine subsidence so they would not help us. An old local informed us that there was a patch of earth to the north of our house that had once sunk, taking a cow with it. He said it was so deep they couldn’t get the cow out. We approached a barrister to see if the developer could be ‘persuaded’ to help us but were advised that the company would bankrupt rather than pay out, not to waste our money on a barrister. Unsurprisingly the company did bankrupt some months later. Maybe someone else did waste some money on a barrister.

We suffered for some time with sloping and movement. If a child spilt a drink it would spill to the other side of the house. We became accustomed to hammering in wedges under the house in an attempt to level it. We removed doors frequently to change the tops and bottoms, sawing pieces off, so that we could open and shut doors. The highway being built above the escarpment was soon blasting as well and with every blast the water in our taps surged water. Car windows in the street shattered and the earth moved. We had to dig a very deep drain and fill it with slag, between us and the new creek bed, the purpose being to endeavour to redirect the new water flow coming from the creek in the new bed. Neighbours helped but with every truck load of slag I saw that purchase of a piano went further from my reach.

We formed a group to advise people of the problems in the area and we all tried help each other. We even advertised our loved house for sale, including in the advertisement that the area and house were subject to earth movement and landslide. There were no takers.

A second mortgage, more than the original cost of the house, gained us an engineer who suggested a particular cement formation to use, a K,  to allow us to lift the house and place it on RSJs. The plan was to have the whole of the house move in the same direction each time there was  movement.  We completed this plan for new foundations and felt a little reassured about living there but there were always worries and small problems as the area moved. Years with a lot of rain were especially worrying.

We spent a lot of money planting trees which would put down deep roots. Even in this we were thwarted as when the electricity was extended along the road for the new houses, the poles were put on the eastern side of the road, our side, so some of the strongest trees were removed or lopped by Endeavour Energy.

Officials, Miners, Councillors, the whole of the escarpment is subject to these problems. Our block even in dry years moved a few centimeters. The engineer used to come up and put his hand into the hole behind a very large rock that was slowly sliding down the hill.

One of the reasons for this subsidence is natural geological movement of the escarpment along the ocean edge. One is because the early miners mined in from the coast, that allowed for subsidence over and into the mines. Most of the mines were left flooded, not filled, so this movement continues.

I'm horrified that the council could consider giving permission for mining to occur from the east. Of course it will cause more and increased subsidence.

Mining to the west of the escarpment has already caused sufficient subsidence to crack creek beds and affect the dams there and that is without natural geological movement.

I have had to move away from that area, the stress and the cost became too much. I’m trying to create a little rainforest in the middle of Corrimal. I don’t want any more people to suffer what we suffered for 25 years in Austinmer.

Please reconsider the cost to Wollongong of careless and damaging mining.

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