

Objection to The Russell Vale Underground Expansion Project

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I strongly object to this project, on grounds that are increasingly obvious to all, and increasingly important.

1. The mine expansion would threaten both surface and ground water from the Cataract Reservoir catchment. This would be a problem even in good times for water. Water security however is emerging as a major issue world wide at the moment, and will especially be a problem in the south east of Australia as this century develops.
2. I am Associate Professor who has many citations in the area of technical change. Given my experience and knowledge, I simply do not trust the “we have a technical fix” argument when it comes to protecting the catchment. In the case of water catchment, the risks are too great.
3. I believe that the company involved recently applied to be de-listed from the ASX, meaning that there is less opportunity to scrutinise the company. There is some chance it is insolvent or approaching that. Not only is this a financial problem. It clearly pushes the risk envelop in terms of what a company will claim, and more importantly what it will actually do, either in terms of mining practices or reparations when damage occurs. Australia is littered with pollution and extensive damage by mining companies that made many promises when they were needed to be made in order to mine, promises that were too easily abandoned later.
4. It is unsurprising that the company is not doing well financially, given that the coal industry is dying. Major trading partners and coal destinations are moving much more quickly than might have been thought only months ago (China) and even weeks ago (Japan) towards zero carbon emissions. In China’s case, they are clearly indicating they want to source coal as much as possible internally while on the way towards zero emissions.
5. I am an academic who has expertise in climate change (I teach a course in climate communication), and who currently works at UNSW Sydney, a university with one of Australia’s leading Climate Change research centres. Australia needs to transition as quickly as possible to renewable energy. It is in fact moving fairly quickly in this direction, for example with plans to build the world’s largest solar plant, that will supply, by 2027, huge amounts of energy to south east Asia (including around of a possible 20% of Singapore’s energy needs). This move towards renewables is despite policy lag and indeed obstacles at times, and despite companies such as Wollongong Coal’s push against this. Imagine how quickly this will occur when policy shifts, as it will have to within the next few years, despite the wishes of industries and others who seem to want to remain in the 20th century way of thinking.
6. I cannot see how this extension supports either local interests in the area or the national interest, given the above.



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