

Submission to the NSW Independent Planning Commission **The Russell Vale Underground Expansion Project (MP09_0013)**

I have an active interest in ensuring public access to a continuous Illawarra Escarpment Conservation Area and Trail Network and the proposed expansion will unnecessarily restrict access for me and friends that often frequent this amazing stretch of the escarpment.

I strongly object to this expansion and believe free access should be available for all residents and visitors to a continuous Illawarra Escarpment Conservation Area and Trail Network as is described in the National Parks and Wildlife Service Illawarra Escarpment Management Plan (2018).

This existing continuous trail includes the areas of the *Lower* and *Upper Escarpment Trails* between Bulli and Balgownie including Rixon's Pass and Broker's Nose. This small section of trail (a length of approximately 6km) is currently controlled by Wollongong Coal and access is blocked by the extension westward of the Russell Vale Colliery lease well beyond its field of actual operation.

This blocked section of trail prevents the opportunity to explore a continuous conservation area and walking trail network that would otherwise extend from Bundeena, in the North, to (potentially) Berry, in the Shoalhaven. This is a remarkable opportunity for the area - socially, economically and environmentally.

The further expansion of these operations (with which this hearing is concerned) over an initial period of 5 years and a stated mine-life of 37 years (according to Wollongong Coal's Annual Reporting) will postpone the realisation of this continuous reserve and trail network and all of the social, economic, and environmental benefits that such a network would afford.

It is clear that given the fiscal state of Wollongong Coal and their apparent inability to meet even the current costs of remediation, (Wollongong Coal Annual Report 2019-2020), combined with the geological and hydrological dangers of mining under the Special Areas of the Catchment (areas in which I'm not even allowed to run), that this proposal should be denied.

It is absurd that such a small and popular section of the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area remains inaccessible and largely unmanaged. The potential social, economic and environmental value of a continuous Illawarra Escarpment reserve and trail network will be indefinitely undermined if this approval is given without a condition of public access, witness and amenity.

Further, these trails already exist and are often and passionately used by the local population and visitors to the area - policing this access would be more difficult and expensive than providing for public access and amenity along existing continuous trails.

Should the expansion be approved regardless of these concerns it should be with the condition of public access to The Lower Escarpment Trail and the area directly west of it to The Upper Escarpment Trail and with regard to the public amenity provided by a continuous Illawarra Escarpment Reserve and Trail network.

Regards,

Luke