I wish to lodge an objection to the expansion of the Russell Vale Mine. Quite frankly, it’s almost inconceivable this expansion is being considered, in terms of both conservation and the loss of recreational opportunities.

Firstly, the forests of the Illawarra escarpment are precious and fragile, a narrow strip of temperate rainforest that has, because of residential development, been narrowed to a mere few hundred metres in places. At the moment, notwithstanding the breaks caused by roads such as Bulli and Mt Ousley Passes, the forest runs continuously from the Royal National Park all the to Berry. This project potentially will break this contiguous strip, with implications both as a vegetation and wildlife corridor. Given the ever-increasing threat posed by bushfires, a corridor like this is irreplaceable.

Secondly, the expansion will come at the cost of recreational opportunities. Currently, the tracks paralleling the escarpment are heavily used by local walkers, runners and cyclists. Closing these tracks will result in a considerable loss of amenities for these groups. Moreover, there has been a long-standing plan to establish a walking track extending from the Royal National Park south to Wollongong (and beyond). When combined with the Royal’s Coast Track, this has the potential to become one of NSW’s (if not Australia’s) finest long-distance coastal walks. These plans would scuttle that opportunity.

This project is simply not in the greater public’s interest. It should not be allowed to proceed.

James McCormack