Coalpac Mining Proposal - Cullen Bullen
Personal Representations to Commission 19 September 2012

Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to make personal representations to you on this matter. I wish you to know that I oppose, in every respect, the Coalpac Mining proposal you are considering.

I expect you have read or will have access to read the earlier submission I lodged on this matter so I expect I will not need to repeat it here.

What I need to highlight to you is that concern I expressed in my earlier submission about the quality of the flora and fauna assessment is justified in light of an on-ground survey undertaken by Lithgow Environment Group which identifies species not picked up by the proponent's hired flora and fauna consultant. It seems to be that the Commissioners would be better served with an independent survey in making a right decision on this matter.

But perhaps you need only take the advice contained within the submission you have from the Office of Environment and Heritage wherein it is stated that the whole of the Ben Bullen State Forest has been identified as being of suitably high conservation value for future reservation under the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

When a government agency entrusted with the protection of the State's natural heritage makes such a statement I believe we all need to take heed.

Again, on consultancy reports, this time with respect to Aboriginal Heritage, I note conflict between the proponent's hired consultant and other submitters to the Commission. This conflict adds more weight to the value of an independent survey directed by the Commission, this time with respect to Aboriginal heritage.

There are other, numerous, points of objection which can be made and I believe will be made by other objectors over the next two days. I would just like to make some personal, albeit it general, observations and points of objection.

I have been in Ben Bullen State Forest and Gardens of Stone National Park. I have travelled from Sydney to Mudgee and back at least a couple of times per year for the past 25 years or more. The area of this proposed mining expansion is a beautiful area and most worthy of conservation.

I just can't comprehend the scale of loss proposed here. I can't bear to bring to mind the sight of what will be something of a huge moonscape being imposed on the community of Cullen Bullen and for those who travel the Castlereagh Highway in the future.

Surely, just one place in Australia, Queenstown in Tasmania, should have been
sufficient testimony to the capacity of mankind to scarify a fully vegetated landscape in the pursuit of monetary gain. The grotesqueness of the landscape one encounters on approaching Queenstown, Tasmania, has as much appeal as going to watch a horror movie - shock value ... yes, but no value whatsoever to the betterment of soul or for sustaining the environment. The like must not be permitted to happen here in the surrounds of Cullen Bullen.

Further, State Forests ought to be areas of vegetation. I expect when State Forests were first conceived there was scope envisaged for tree removal and replacement. All the while, however, there would have been the other vegetative structural layers, shrubs, herbs, grasses etc, to remain in situ. It is against the notion of state forests to remove all structural layers as is proposed by Coalpac here.

And it is just not good enough for the proponent to say the site will be revegetated upon conclusion of mining activity. Vast scales of rock layering which presently underpin the landscape will be lost, never to be returned. A totally different topography will one day occupy the eye and vegetation planted into that topography, as replacement vegetation, will be a man-made experiment set against the present vegetation (and fauna habitat) being the result of thousands of years of natural selection at all levels of structure - from tree canopy, through shrub layer, to herbs, grasses, ground covers to moss (and more). This is an experiment giving no confidence to me, nor should it you, that ecological sustainability presently experienced will be returned.

A statement made by a representative of Coalpac in public media last week adds weight to that concern. That representative, in saying that failure to approve the proposed expansion will increase the price of power. Commissioners, that is an admission of the finiteness of the substance being extracted. As such, it is also an acknowledgment that the proponent’s existence is finite, being dependent upon coal availability and market influences. No guarantee can therefore be given that the proponent will be around to undertake the very expensive and huge exercise of trying to revegetate nearly 1,000ha of all layers of vegetative structure presently occupying the site. Given planting loss rates the time scale for the exercise must be measured as several decades - something the proponent cannot give assurance it will be around for given such variabilities as availability, demand and price for coal as well as the potential for corporate takeover.

Commissioners, I ask you to include the comments I have made today with the comments already made in my earlier submission and that you take into account informed opinion from other objectors to this Coalpac proposal.

I repeat, I oppose the Coalpac proposal completely.

Wayne Olling