

From: [REDACTED]
To: [PAC Enquiries Mailbox](#)
Subject: Objection to Russell Vale Mine expansion
Date: Tuesday, 8 December 2015 11:44:48 AM

To whom it may concern,

My name is Anne O'Brien, I am a PhD student living in Sydney. I am writing to object to the proposal to yet again expand the Russell Vale Colliery, a long wall mine that has already negatively impacted upon Greater Sydney's water supply and the upland swamps that feed it.

I will do so by giving a hypothetical scenario.

Just say you are a public servant working in water, and you staring down a drought in Sydney- at the beginning of an El Nino weather pattern.

You decide to run a public awareness campaign to conserve water. You distribute egg timers to households to encourage residents to reduce the length of their showers, and that you successfully change the habits of half a million people by one minute per day. A reasonable achievement, saving 7.3 megalitres of water, roughly equivalent to three Olympic –sized swimming pools each day.

Imagine also that at the same time there is a coalmine underneath the swamps that feed into the Southern catchments, the most reliable dams for the Sydney region for rainfall in times of drought. That coal mine has plans to expand to create more longwall extraction panels at a seam deep in the earth, underneath two other coal seams already mined over the past 100 years. Hydrological consultants engaged by the company predict that the same amount of water per day that you just saved by reaching out to half a million people with egg timers could be lost daily from the public water supply through damage to the water holding capacity of that dam. However you are frustrated because mining policy trumps water policy. The regulations that target individual people and their water use and trespassing into the special areas somehow do not apply to mining corporations.

Wouldn't you get angry at inter-departmental meetings on this issue? You may even risk having 'unprofessional' arguments because the public interest is worth it. It is right to challenge the priorities of a planning process that allows its own government efforts to protect its resources to be ultimately futile. That compromises the future preparedness of its population for hundreds of years to come for the sake of economic activity for only a few months, undertaken by a near bankrupt mining company that has a track record of not cleaning up after itself.

Citizens across the Sydney basin are becoming more informed of the fact that our state government and its planning processes do not have our long term interests at heart. In February this year I took part in a "Walk for water" from the Cataract Dam to Macquarie Street over the course of a week. We began shortly after several days of rain that brought other dams to their capacity- but not so the Cataract. It was clear from observation of the water level that the dam level was nowhere near capacity. Questions have been already asked and to my knowledge not satisfactorily answered regarding any possible mining damage that is already affecting the capacity of the Cataract Dam.

The public deserves holistically governed and systemically oriented water planning. Individually-targeted water saving campaigns can only do so much. We need to recover something of the public commitment of the workers who not only built these dams but also created surrounding gardens and picnic areas that still stand today. We need the foresight and technical seriousness of the civil /water engineers of 135 years ago, who designed the upper Canal to feed water towards Prospect Reservoir with a gradient of 0.1 per cent, dropping only 50 metres for its 54 km of length.

The public deserves to know the full details of planning decisions that impact upon the drought preparedness of Australia's most populated region. The present and the future residents of the Sydney region deserve to be treated as worthy of greater regard than a mining corporation that scarcely gives any regard to its public obligations.

Regards,

Anne O'Brien
Parramatta Climate Action Network,
Western Sydney Environment Network