

Russell Vale Colliery Underground Expansion Project

I object to the proposed Russell Vale Colliery Underground Expansion Project on the following grounds:

Wollongong Coal is seeking to expand their Russell Vale coal mine directly underneath some of the most sensitive parts of Sydney's drinking water catchment and too close to Cataract Reservoir. This expansion is proposing to use risky new mining methods to extract a third seam of coal beneath two previously mined seams, placing our catchment at great risk.

This expansion is highly likely to cause subsidence, cracking and water loss in Cataract River, Cataract Creek and Bellambi Creek and associated tributaries as well as a number of water storing upland swamps in the vicinity of the Cataract Reservoir. Modelling by the mine's own consultant, WRM, estimates the proposed mining may result in surface water base flow loss of up to 7.3 ML per day, the equivalent of the average daily water consumption of over 24,000 people.

In addition, due to a fault dissecting the area of the proposal, according to the Commonwealth Government's Independent Expert Committee, it has the potential to cause the contents of Cataract Reservoir to leak out through mines in the area.

Cataract Reservoir is important as a reliable source of drinking water in the Sydney Water system and it and Cordeaux Reservoir are the *only* source of drinking water for the Camden, Campbelltown and Wollondilly council areas.

This proposal is for an extraction increase from 1 million tonnes to 3 million tonnes per year, an improbable increase considering that the mine has not produced that amount in the recent past. Nevertheless the production of 200,000 to 300,000 tonnes per annum has caused considerable environmental impacts for the surrounding community. Being so close to a residential area and considering the current low levels of production cause problems, the proposed increase appears unworkable and irresponsible.

One major environmental problem is that of particulate pollution. A company report estimated that the Russell Vale Colliery emits 779 tonnes of particulate matter pollution (coal dust and particles) per year, much more than the Dendrobium colliery, just south of Wollongong. Coal particulates are a well known cause of human health problems, including respiratory and cardio-vascular diseases. Therefore Russell Vale does not seem an appropriate place for high particulate emitting coal mine and one that wants to expand too.

Wollongong Coal would also seem to be hard pressed to confront these problems as it is a loss making company. It has a reported \$657 million shortfall in net current assets at 31 March, 2015 and \$371 million of net losses in the last two years. It does not have the investment capital to follow through on its commitments to develop and safely operate the mine. The firm's auditors, Ernst and Young, note that the company's financial situation raises significant uncertainty that they will remain a going concern even over the next 12 months.

If substantial damage was to occur to the water catchment and storage system as a result of this mining, it seems increasingly unlikely that Wollongong Coal would be around to fix the problem.

What other city in the world allows longwall mining under its public water catchments? On that basis alone, this application should be rejected.

Graham Lalchere

