

Submission to PAC Public Hearing on Russell Vale Colliery Expansion project

8 December, 2015

Miguel Heatwole *Escopella*

lyrics of the song we sang are overleaf

I am here today to object to the proposed Underground Expansion Project.

Modelling by Wollongong Coal's own consultant, WRM, estimates the proposed mining may result in surface water baseflow loss of up to 7.3 ML (Mega litres or Million Litres) per day.¹ This represents **the equivalent of the average daily water consumption for 24,580 people.**² The Department of Planning claims that this is a worst case scenario estimate and we therefore should not be guided by this possible scenario, however worst case scenarios can still eventuate. This figure is affirmed by the mine's own consultant and even if just a fraction of this water was lost, this is unacceptable.

As a person who believes that the environment, and particularly drinking water, should be respected and protected, I myself make an effort to save water everyday. For example, when I brush my teeth I only use a cup of water and I don't let the tap water run. I try to be economical with water in showers and keep them short.

Therefore I was shocked to read this figure. This is equivalent to the daily water usage of almost half the population of my own local government area, the City of Leichardt in Sydney's inner west.³

The Cataract Reservoir currently holds about 87,000 ML and is at 89% of storage capacity⁴, however this is not always the case. For example, less than a decade ago in the midst of a drought Cataract Reservoir held only 34,190 ML.⁵ At such times of low water availability a daily water loss of 7.3ML due to Wollongong Coal's mining would, over a one year period, **represent the equivalent of 7.8% of the available stored water of the Cataract Reservoir.** With climate change, more extreme weather events are predicted and there is increased risk of periods of drought. Consequently, risking this level of damage to the Special Areas would be negligent on behalf of the NSW government and simply cannot be justified as "in the public interest".

This level of surface water loss is not the only concern that I have with the Underground Expansion Project. Longwall mining by its very nature destroys aquifers containing groundwater reserves. It is not fully understood how these aquifers influence surface water. However in the aforementioned drought in 2006 the Sydney Catchment Authority explored accessing groundwater aquifers to supplement the dwindling water supplies in its reservoirs. We do not know what the future may bring and it's unacceptable for aquifers in the Special

¹ Addendum Report: Major Project Assessment, Russell Vale Colliery Underground Expansion Project (MP 09_0013), NSW Govt, Dept of Planning and Environment, November 2015 p 12

² <http://www.sydneywater.com.au/sw/teachers-students/facts-about-water/primary-students/how-do-we-use-water/water-use-in-sydney/index.htm>

³ <http://profile.id.com.au/leichardt/> Leichardt Council area population 58,000

⁴ <http://www.waternsw.com.au/supply/visit/cataract-dam>

⁵ http://www.waternsw.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/61710/06-09-21-SCA.pdf

Areas – the inner sanctum of the water catchment for Australia’s most populous city - to be wrecked for short term gains for multinational mining companies.

The royalties from this project are estimated to be \$23 million over the 5 year life of the project. This works out to be just one dollar per year for each of the 4.6 million residents of Greater Sydney that rely on the drinking water catchment. It’s not even enough money to buy a bottle of water.

How can the state government possibly sanction this level of water wastage? Even if the Russell Vale Colliery were truly a State-significant project, it would be ludicrous to risk damage to the Special Areas and to Cataract Reservoir. However, the February PAC review put the project in context, as it stated:

“The Department of Trade & Investment’s Division of Resources & Energy notes that this proposal is considered small and would be ranked 50 out of 56 producing coal mines in NSW if approved (DRE, 2015). In advising the Department of Planning & Environment of the significance of the resource, the Division of Resources & Energy concluded “that the significance of the resource lies mainly in its ability to maintain coal production from the Southern coalfield and utilisation of the Port Kembla Coal Terminal” which, it goes on to confirm, is currently underutilised.⁶

It simply cannot be sensibly justified that this project is in the public interest. I ask the Commission to conclude that the Russell Vale Colliery Underground Expansion Project is unapprovable.

The wind will drive the fine white sails of turbines out on plain and hill
We'll see a cleaner wind prevail. Our Earth can live if there's a will
We don't need your filthy coal, your coal seam gas or oil. We're not going to
pay the toll of seeing our Earth spoiled. Wind power! Wave power! Power from
the sun! The power of our marching feet, our voices raised along the street will see
this battle won. Our land is bathed in sunshine bright, we have to shout to make them
see that power to turn on our lights should come from solar energy.

⁶ Russell Vale Colliery – Underground Expansion Project Review Report, Paul Forward (Chair) Brian Gilligan Joe Woodward PSM 2 April 2015, p ii