

## **Statement/Comments by Karl Howard SCHAERF to PAC Hearing, into Proposed Wallarah 2 Coalmine at Wyong Golf Club, 3 November 2017.**

Thank you for the opportunity to address this hearing of the PAC.

I wish, firstly, to provide a brief outline of my background.

I am a fifth generation Bathurstian, a direct descendant of at least three (known), Convict forebears, of whom two, if not all three, were assigned to the Bathurst District in the early 1830's and two of whom married, thus establishing my mother's paternal lineage and the other married a free settler, establishing her maternal lineage.

Upon emancipation, both my male forebears became farm labourers (likely, employed by those to whom they had first been assigned as, effectively, slave labour), and, eventually, they and their descendants became either, or both, small landowners and farm workers, so much so that my mother's paternal grandfather (James Colin Howard), became a life member of Bathurst AH&P Association, had a pavilion at Bathurst Showground named in his honour and, somewhat remarkably, the adjoining Trevitt Pavillion was named in honour of said Trevitt, who married a member of the Howard family. My great grandfather (Howard), also, for some years, was part owner of a nursery at Napoleon Reef (a small, gold mining settlement at the foot of Mt. Ovens, to the east of Bathurst), and in his later years, owned a well-known chaff cutting business, operating in the Bathurst District.

Not dissimilarly, my mother's maternal grandfather (Joseph Edward Dibley), became a well known market gardener in the Bathurst area and one of his son's a well known apiarist, whose own son (my mother's first cousin), was, for many years, Secretary of the Commercial Apiarists Association of NSW.

Several of my mother's first cousins became involved in the Coal Mining Industry in the coal mines in the Lithgow and nearby coal fields. One of her father's many nephews became a Mines Inspector in Lithgow and lost his life as a result of a rock fall in a mine, which he entered to inspect, following an earlier fall and evacuation of the mine and, as far as I'm aware, the husband of one of her father's many female nieces, also died in a mining accident, near Cullen Bullen.

I grew-up in Bathurst and like many, became interested in freshwater fishing, to which I was first introduced by my grandfather. Eventually, my interest in freshwater fishing and the impacts upon our aquatic environment of past, unwise land and water use, lead me to becoming a member of the then, largest angler representative organisation in the Central West of NSW, the Central Acclimatisation Society (CAS). After only being a member for a little over 12 months, I became Secretary of the Bathurst Branch of CAS (a position I occupied for many years), and, ultimately, became Secretary of the entire organisation, a position I occupied for more than forty years and only relinquished (long after I moved to the CentralCoast, in 1997), in 2013.

During my period as Secretary of CAS, I served on many NSW DPI Committees as an angler representative and was involved in many issues, affecting freshwater fish, including environmental issues affecting the aquatic environment, including water extraction, mining, major pollution events, fish stocking, etc. I also challenged, on behalf of Bathurst Branch, CAS, many applications for the granting of irrigation licences upon unregulated streams in the Bathurst District, principally, applications for licences to extract water from the already, over committed, Macquarie and Turon Rivers and a number of small tributaries of both those rivers. My actions, I assure you, did little to endear me to many, especially, the then NSW Water Resources Commission, local landowners and, indeed, some members of my own family, still engaged in farming near Bathurst, particularly those downstream of Ben Chifley Dam on the Campbells River (which forms the Macquarie River, downstream of the confluence with the Fish River).

In April, 2015, I purchased the house I moved to from Gosford (where I resided, for the previous 19 years), in early September, 2015 – 12 Violet Road, Hamlyn Terrace. At the time of the purchase, the solicitor I engaged to undertake conveyance of the transaction, was at great pains to advise me the property is (was, perhaps, given the, apparent, recent - July, 2017 - amendments to the Coal Mine Subsidence Compensation Act 2017 and changes to the Subsidence Districts), within a Mines Subsidence District. Thus, despite being well aware, prior, to the significance of mines subsidence, my perception of the risks and implications was further heightened.

Given my background, I believe I am, therefore, whilst not a "native" of the Central Coast, well able to understand the implications of the proposed Wallarah 2 Coal Project and the likely impacts upon the environment, including water supply, loss of water to the environment, local farmers and those living in the ever increasingly urbanised areas of the Central Coast and the consequent, ceaseless demands for reliable and safe water supplies for the rapidly growing population of this region. Similarly, I am well able to understand, given I came to the Central Coast from the site of the first, white, inland settlement in what became Australia, post white invasion of this country, the impacts of unwise land usage, particularly the impacts of over clearing, over grazing, mining and urbanisation, upon the precious, ever diminishing freshwater available, even during periods of average to higher than average rainfall in this, the driest inhabited continent on Earth, likely to be even more severely affected by the increasingly obvious, impacts of climate change and global warming. I was, obviously, present, here, on the Central Coast, during the much talked about "Millennium Drought", which not only caused much angst, due to the imposition of severe water restrictions throughout this region, but also, a huge financial burden upon all residents to secure the supply of high quality, raw water for storage in the nearby Mardi and Mangrove Creek Dams. I am, also, well aware of the implications of inappropriate land use/management, over clearing of catchments, erosion, siltation and the situation, as currently exists around Lithgow, of toxic discharges from Springvale Mine, resulting in pollution of Coxs River and elsewhere, particularly on the NSW South Coast, likely impacting upon Sydney's water supply. That catchment is far, far larger than that from which the water supply for the Central Coast is drawn and as a consequence, any pollution of the smaller, Central Coast Water Supply catchment is likely to have a far greater impact than is likely to result from the pollution of the Coxs River by Springvale Mine, and sources of pollution on other feeder streams, due to, if nothing else, dilution of the toxic elements by a far greater volume of available water.

Like many, I fear that insufficient regard has been given to the concerns of not only local residents, but also, the Central Coast Council, whose own, expert, scientific officer's report, indicates the proposed Wallarah 2 Coal Project will have a number of impacts, not only upon the catchment of the Central Coast's water supplies, but further impacts upon the flows of a number of smaller, local streams, further impacting upon the ability to harvest sufficient water to meet the ever increasing demands being placed upon a relatively, small catchment area.

I believe that, in light of the amended proposal to that previously rejected, the project must not proceed until further, full consideration and assessment by the body charged with the onerous task of ensuring proper management and equitable use, including that required for environmental flows and sustainability, of the increasingly, scarce freshwater resources of NSW, WaterNSW, has been obtained, despite the fact WaterNSW, seemingly, are claimed to have addressed the issues of loss of water to the Central Coast Water Supply. This concern is further exacerbated in light of the recent, startling, challenging and damning revelations by the ABC Television Program, Four Corners, of the probable mismanagement by WaterNSW, of water resources, especially those intended for environmental flows, in the Murray-Darling Basin. Given the circumstances, as revealed in that program, subsequent revelations and the ongoing furore, I, like many others, have little confidence that WaterNSW have the competence, the ability, or the integrity to either be believed, or trusted, with the management of the state's water resources and until all investigations and enquiries are completed, any decisions made by WaterNSW, prior to that program being aired, cannot be accepted and therefore, are unacceptable as baseline data which can be relied upon by this Commission. I am also gravely concerned that neither WaterNSW, nor NSW DPI Fisheries, appear to have had sufficient input into this current review, particularly as the two streams, in the immediate area of the proposed mine; Wallarah and Spring Creeks, are in close proximity, above the area of proposed coal extraction. Nor do I believe that NSW DPI Fisheries, in particular, have had the opportunity to undertake a full and exhaustive review of the potential impacts upon the far greater populations of A. bass, estuary perch and other, increasingly threatened, lesser species of native fishes known to be in the Wyong River and Jilliby Creek. In fact, I have been unable to find any reference to any potential impacts upon the remnant populations of native fishes, or their habitats, in the Review Documents and find this incredibly disconcerting, but typical of the attitude to fishes, which, as has often been observed, are nowhere near as "soft and cuddly" as many of our other native animals are perceived.

Both Spring and Wallarah Creeks (into which the former drains), before entering Budgewoi Lake are known to hold two iconic, predatory species of native fish, in both the fresh and brackish reaches. In the freshwater reaches, Australian bass (*Macquaria novemaculeata*), a species which is of increasing concern to fisheries scientists, researchers and concerned anglers, along with a number of other, smaller, native freshwater fishes, such as galaxias (important, as they, like most Australian native fishes, are under ever increasing threat, both as unique species, most of which are endemic to Australia, and also, as part of the food chain for larger fishes, such as A. bass and estuary perch [*Macquaria colonorum*], in this part of Australia), are known to be present. A. bass have another, unique characteristic – they are catadromous – meaning they spawn in marine environments – in the case of A. bass, in brackish, estuarine waters – the eggs hatch and the young migrate upstream, to the freshwater reaches where they live until mature and, along with their mature relatives/parents, return, each winter to spawn in the brackish water and return to the freshwater in late winter/early spring. This cycle continues throughout their long lives.

(A. bass are known to live for many years.) A further, unique characteristic is that, like the salmonids of the Northern Hemisphere, A. bass are known to retain the memory of their "home" streams and as such, NSW Fisheries have recognised at least three, distinct regions for A. bass populations along the NSW Coast and many researchers and knowledgeable anglers believe there are, in fact, more than three distinct sub-species of the species. As a consequence, A. bass, bred in hatcheries for release into a number of man-made impoundments, which have prevented the annual migrations of the species, must be drawn from brood stock collected in the zone appropriate to the waters being stocked.

E. perch, although very closely related to A. bass (so much so that many anglers, even to this day, have some difficulty in distinguishing the species, when captured in estuarine waters, remain in the brackish/estuarine reaches and are only rarely found in freshwater, but are, nevertheless, highly dependant upon regular, seasonal flows from the coastal streams which have a marked impact upon their habitat and survival.

Therefore, I contend, this proposed mine must not be given, as some already believe it will be, today, the "green light" to proceed, until further, exhaustive review and research is permitted to be undertaken by the body (NSW DPI Fisheries, already, apparently excluded from properly commenting upon the revised proposal), charged with the great responsibility of ensuring the viability, long into the future, of at least two, iconic, increasingly threatened native fish, Australian bass and estuary perch. The likely impact of yet another significant development, if permitted and which will, in all probability, result in the loss of not only habitat, but also, the extant populations of A bass, estuary perch and, in all probability of other, smaller native freshwater fishes, can only be regarded as, potentially, reprehensible, in the extreme. Future generations of not only Australians, but also, many others, across the planet, will be justified in condemning all of us for failing, yet again, to prevent yet another chapter in Australia's already unenviable record of having caused the greatest number of extinctions amongst native animal species of all classes, in likely, the shortest time in terms of the evolution of life on Earth.

We are only custodians, not "owners" of this <sup>land</sup> ~~place~~ and, above all else, we owe it to the first people of Australia, who we so brutally and nearly, but for some miracle, would also have made extinct, to not proceed with this proposed mine.

Karl Howard Schaerf

