

Joedie Lawler

CEO Purfleet Taree Local Aboriginal land council

representing our Board, 351 members and our Aboriginal community.

I am Also a Biripi descendant

I belong to the land as did my mother my grandmother, her mother and so on.

I am from the shark people and the family of Wahtoo the Possum.

This place to me is sacred, and its significance is carried from as far north into Queensland as the mountain range reaches and the same distance to the south into Victoria,

we are as many nations

connected by the story lines that start with the creation of the land its mountains, its rivers and its oceans.

My role has and will always be to protect this land as you would protect your mother.

My belief is that I was born from the earth through my mother's womb and that I was born with the responsibility to ensure my children's connection to this land.

We have a LORE that governs our belief as Aboriginal people, like you have imposed a law that we have no choice but to accept.

Within our law we are responsible for the protection of our totems, their environment and their survival.

In managing cultural heritage for the Australian government, I learnt that you call this biodiversity, we call it responsibility,

I listened to your science and theories of creation and we call it cultural knowledge.

Something that is learnt and shared over a lifetime in a process we call Ngarra- To listen to learn to know.

You see our culture doesn't lie in the evidence that you require us to provide to prove we existed in a space

but the living culture, the biodiversity, the species we fight to protect,

the medicines that are rare in this landscape which may one day be the only cure to save us. *from current cancers & future illnesses.*

The point I find the hardest to accept here is the loss of infrastructure, the increased benefit to economy, the increased employment and ongoing benefit to the town

To me, these points are immediate benefits,

but what after the lease has expired and the mine closes,

the sickness it leaves behind, the chronic illness that has been statistically proven for towns in close proximity to mines.

Our children's children,

their parents and grandparents might have well lined pockets but are the risks worth our children's wellbeing,

what kind of parents might we be if our focus is economic benefit to this generation and the town.

When I was young I was told a story about the rainbow serpent
how it travelled across the land scape weaving under and over the
land

leaving tracks that became rivers, and pushing the earth up into
formations as it dove into the earth until it came to its final resting
space along the east coast

(that we now call the great eastern range) where it dove deep into
the earth pushing the land up as it buried its self.

Then in the story they talked about the great dangers of digging up
the rainbow serpent and the destruction it would cause, the death,
the greed, the sickness.

Now as an Adult I understand the story in the context of the
resources, the minerals that lie under the earth, the coal, the gold,
the uranium etc etc. the death it brings to the workers with blacked
lungs and poisoned bodies, and those in its path with chronic heart
and kidney disease.

I think my ancestors knew a long time ago that this was wrong that
one day our greed would overcome rationale.

At a stage in my life I thought success meant you needed wealth to
own everything, have a high paying job, and lots of money in the
bank. I used to chase the dollar work for the company that offered
the best package.

now I know that wealth comes with happiness, family and being
content with who I am.

I am proud of who I am becoming and that my culture is finally taking
first place to me

within this western society I find myself having to conform to.

I feel like no matter how hard I try I just can't seem to fit into the
ideal of normal thought.

I found the same in the other context when I worked for government, that no matter how many times I explained my culture I was always asked the same questions.

My culture is ancient. The oldest living culture in the world existing and surviving on the known oldest continent

This is surely a valuable resource for our country to finally prioritise.

I understand that this was not one of the factors that have brought us to today, but I would like to highlight that this area within and around Gloucester is extremely significant and rare in the context of what we have left. Within this area was one of the largest initiation grounds on the east coast consisting of 28 carved trees representing 28 different groups. I have managed cultural heritage across the state, I can say I have never come across this in any other location within NSW.

Finally, I would like to request that my people the Biripi people, the living cultural values and the cultural significance of this area is considered for the first time in making your final decision not to go ahead with this mine.

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak here today

We are in 2017. We are recognised as the descendants of this area.

I would hope that our cultural values are important enough to be considered