

MUDGEE WINE ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION

Regarding the

BOWDENS SILVER MINE

To whom it may concern,

Thankyou for the opportunity to provide a submission in regards the Bowdens Silver mine in Lue NSW.

The Mudgee Wine Association is a not-for-profit organisation located within the Mid-Western Regional Council. We have a total of 66 members consisting of 35 Full Members, all are wineries. The is remaining Associate Members – consist of beverage and food producers, restaurants and accommodation providers.

Our organisation with just its Full Members employs 857 people in various facets of the grape growing, manufacturing and wine distribution. These include owners, managers, cellar door staff, direct sales, vineyard employees and contractors for spraying, harvesting, pruning, transport, winery production staff plus staff for events run by MWA.

These figures do not include any jobs in other tourism industries nor our Associate Members.

Bowdens have stated they will provide 250 jobs over the extended period of 23 years.

Our question is “at what cost to the jobs that already exist in our already thriving industry, the wine Industry.”

The regional visitor economy has been building rapidly in recent years with Mudgee named Top Tourist Town in Australia for two years running – in both 2021 and 2022. These visitors come for the incredible local wine, some of the best foodie experiences in the state, heritage sites and to enjoy the regions natural beauty.

Visitation to the region has increased from 691,000 in 2016-‘19 to 826,000 in 2020-‘21 this has resulted in considerable growth in spending in our region. Using figures supplied by Mudgee Regional Tourism Inc. (on their website) the average spend per person is $398, this includes accommodation, entertainment, food and wine. This brings upwards of $300 million for the Mid-Western Regional Council’s economy.

Mudgee Regional Tourism Inc. has just launched their new Wellness Tourism Strategy featuring nature, healthy activities, good food and wine experiences - this is one of the fastest growing tourism sectors globally.

Visitors are looking for sustainability in the products they consume, human health and wellbeing. They want to relax in a clean healthy environment, drink beautiful wines, eat wholistic, locally grown food - also known as the ‘Paddock To Plate’ experience. They love the story Mudgee Region brings to their experience, how are the grapes grown, how the wine is made, who made the wine and especially how it tastes. They love to experience everything from simple cellar doors located on back roads to beautiful meals in stunning surrounds with all the trimmings.

All of our wine businesses are family run enterprises, even the largest ones. Along with this aspect, many are either accredited or practising organic grape growers and wineries. Our visitors love to meet the people behind the brand and feel they have a part to play in the success of our small businesses, which is what they take home. Mr Huon Hook can’t be wrong, we are a region that has the ‘best of the best’ and that can’t be put into a dollar figure. We strive for perfection in all our operations and endeavours.

What price this mine?

If this mine is allowed to go ahead it will have a domino effect. Firstly visitation to the region would decrease - not many people want to spend their hard-earned cash in a region that has fine lead dust contamination in their food, wine, water and environment. This will have the knock-on effect of hospitality, cellar door and eventually winery staff being be laid off.

Can the region afford to lose any of these ‘clean' jobs, only to be replaced by ‘dirty’ jobs?

These ‘proposed’ jobs have long term ramifications for our natural environment, community affinity, generational and historical businesses.

Then we come to the actual growing of grape vines and wine production.

It is well documented that fine lead dust can and does travel 1,000’s of kilometres. Lead dust from both Port Pirie and Mount Isa can be identified by their ‘DNA’ and it has been found in the Antarctic. So a mere 40 kms into Mudgee and beyond is nothing.

This fine lead dust can and will settle on the vine leaves.

This can and will inhibit photosynthesis.

This can and will affect general vine health - vines will fail to thrive.

This can and will impede fruit set.

Lead can and will be absorbed into the fruit.

This can and will impact overall production of wine across our region.

Obviously, the above situations will have a sliding scale of affects and degree of damage. But no one will know for sure without testing. Our people, our family-owned businesses will be asking themselves …………..

Is my fruit contaminated?

Do I take the chance to harvest this fruit, this year?

Can I afford to take the chance of trying to make good wine with suspect fruit?

Are my vines permanently damaged?

If so to what extent, will they recover next year or will this repeat again next harvest?

Can we continue to go on producing wine with this potential, ongoing threat continuously hanging over us?

Jobs will be lost in all sectors of the industry and people will leave the area.

Some may say we are overly exaggerating the situation.

Those that suggest we are overstating the imposed risk associated with this Lead Mine project don’t have the collective lived experience we do.

In our very recent wine history (2020) we have had a whole of region vintage wiped out due to Smoke Taint. This contamination of our grapes and subsequent cancellation of production has caused an ongoing financial burden to many, especially the smaller producers. All of this occurred due to a bush fire located over 127 kms away. So a lead mine on our doorstep is of great concern to all with future consequences and a source of financial insecurity.

We have a large number of organic growers; this process takes years to become certified.

What will happen to their livelihood, who will compensate them or other growers for loss of income?

Base line testing of uncontaminated fruit will have to be undertaken by all producers within a certain radius of Lue prior to the mine commencing. Then ongoing testing of fruit to identify contaminants and their levels will continue each year. This will depend on the prevailing weather conditions in the lead up to harvest. Again yet another financial and time cost for producers to carry. That is if this mine was to go ahead – currently we don’t have this impost and financial burden.

The Australian Wine Research Institute and NSW Wine will discuss further effects on fruit production and quality in more depth in their own submissions.

This mine sits near Lawson Creek and feeds into the Cudgegong River and then onto the Burrendong Dam. This is the main source of irrigation water for a substantial number of wineries along the catchment from Lue to Gulgong and beyond.

We also have some very serious concerns regarding the effects of potential Acid Mine Drainage. Acid mine drainage, acid and metalliferous drainage (AMD), or acid rock drainage (ARD) is the outflow of acidic water from metal mines this mine being lead and zinc and silver

Acid rock drainage occurs naturally within some environments as part of the rock weathering process but is exacerbated by large-scale earth disturbances characteristic of mining and other large construction activities, usually within rocks containing an abundance of sulphide minerals. Areas where the earth has been disturbed may create acid rock drainage. In many localities, the liquid that drains is be highly acidic, and in such cases it is treated as acid rock drainage. This liquid often contains highly toxic metals, such as copper or iron. These, combined with reduced pH, have a detrimental impact on the streams aquatic environments.

 Acidic drainage is detected within 2–5 years after mining begins, whereas at other mines, it is not detected for several decades. Content testing is required to determine the leaching. In addition, acidic drainage may be generated for decades or centuries after it is first detected. For this reason, acid mine drainage is considered a serious long-term environmental problem associated with mining.

The leaching from this rock when the lining is compromised will go into Lawson Creek and into the Mudgee water system down stream. No irrigation can be drawn from the river as it will be a toxic stream.

Who will supply us with fresh water for producing and processing some of Australia’s finest wines?

Bowdens have stated that once mining has ceased they will cover the waste rock with a 1.5 mm plastic tarp covering or Geotech and then a thin layer of soil. No trees can be planted on this site as this could compromise and penetrate the lining.

We are not experts, just simple grape and wine producers, but the experts have told us this proposed mine has the potential to have a huge effect on the Mudgee Wine and Visitor economy especially as some aspects are trial systems, not yet proven. Say goodbye to our community amenity - no more swimming in rivers and definitely no irrigation on the grapes.

This will have a huge impact on a historic, proven, viable, intergenerational, family based manufacturing businesses and the potential to destroy the Mudgee Wine and Grape industry along with our reputation as the #1 Top Tourist Town destination in Australia.

We, the Mudgee Wine Association, are strongly opposed to the Bowdens Silver Mine proceeding in the proposed current format.

You, the IPC Commissioners have the power to shape and determine if the state goes for short term financial gains over long term community livelihoods in this, our little part of the world – please consider well.