

Name: Janet Walk

Address: Camboon (9km from mine site)

Position: Objection

Background

As a Mental Health Nurse I was contracted to work in Borroloola in 2013 at the time of Glencore's Lead/Zinc/Silver McArthur River Mine (MRM) disaster. My position was primarily Suicide Prevention. Borroloola was identified at the time to have the highest suicide rates in the Northern Territory (NT) and the distress in the community was palpable.

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/the-race-to-avert-disaster-at-the-nts-mcarthur-river-mine/7159504>

In 2013 Glencore's McArthur River Mine (MRM) zinc/lead and silver mine in the NT had a waste rock dump that spontaneously combusted sending plumes of sulphur dioxide into the air and across the floodplain. The mine is 60km from Borroloola, a town of 3000 Garawa, Yanyuwa, Mara and Gadunji people. Glencore did not inform the Environmental Protection Authority for another 4 months. The local people rang the EPA and made the notification.

Glencore had misclassified its waste rock during the EIS as 12 per cent reactive potentially acid-forming (PAF) rock, and the rest non-acid-forming (NAF).

When it received the results of new geotechnical studies in August 2013 it realised it actually had 90 per cent reactive rock—made up of several categories that were potentially acidic, alkaline or metals leaching.

Since then Glencore have made numerous attempts to deal with this toxic unmanageable disaster. Toxic waste is seeping into the water table from under the waste rock emplacement (WRE). The post closure management (if it can be managed) is to last 1000 years. Glencore were ordered by the EPA to compose an EIS to deal with the environmental crisis and management of the mine post closure, the details of which are too detailed for this submission but are available publicly:

<https://ntepa.nt.gov.au/your-business/public-registers/environmental-impact-assessments-register/completed-assessments/register/mcarthur-river-mine-overburden>

The Borroloola community depends on the land, estuaries and waterways of the McArthur River hunting fish, dugong, turtle and mud crab. To date no research has been conducted on correlates between the MRMs disastrous impact on the environment and its effect on suicide rates locally. Given the intense interdependence local Yanyuwa and Garawa people have with the

land and environment, I am in no doubt that research would find strong correlates for suicide rates. For these people they and the land are one being - physically, mentally and spiritually

Bowdens Proposal

Suicide during drought in rural communities is well researched (1). Depression and anxiety are the leading mental health disorders in this cohort. The burden of uncertainty of weather patterns, the impact of extreme weather events, fluctuations in primary production markets, feral animal and insect plagues and bushfires are part of life's stressors.

The new stressor in the lives of rural communities is the extraction industries. The mining companies who arrive sponsoring sport organisations, Local Government events, Men's Sheds, schools and so on often provide little to no information on the negative impacts on the physical and mental health burden on the town and its surrounds with their mining proposals. Rather than see mining as "providing jobs" - rural communities know full well that for them it means expensive court battles over water use, clean healthy air, quiet starry nights, and the end of income provided through tourism. It poses a threat to their small businesses - cafes, restaurants, wine cellar doors and as one viticulturist said "When was the last time you booked a holiday in Mt Isa?" Local mine workers work unsociable, long hours and are at risk of respiratory conditions that last a lifetime.(2)

Community Consultative Committee (CCC) meetings between landholders and mining companies are often at the end of a hard days work and is filled with pie charts, graphs, maps and geological terms and anachronisms such as PAF, NAF, WRE, DPE, IPC, AMD and so on. Farmers go home after CCC meetings at 9:00 at night worried. They aren't only worried about themselves. They are worried about their neighbours whose farm and thriving BnB would be replaced by the tailings dam, the PAF rock dump, the processing plant. They find themselves wondering if their neighbour sells to the mine, what will become of them. Conversations between neighbours become less fluid, guarded. Rural bushfire brigades that didn't break under the pressure of the Gospers Mega Fire fracture under the pressure of the "proposed mine". Lifelong community bonds fray. The vitality of community life starts to feel the weight of the mining proponent. People deal with the threat to their home, health and livelihood alone. Sleepless nights, early morning wakening, irritability, loss of appetite, ruminating, helplessness are the creeping symptoms of depression.

At the IPC hearings 80 speakers were in no doubt that they will be impacted negatively. Either through lead dust and its impact on the health of family, friends and the community, or the added stress of living with lead dust and the anxiety that can cause, the impact on the tourist industry, the primary production, the viticulture and olive growing industries. Most importantly on our health and that of our children. Was today the day when the wind blew in my direction and my family, animals, veggie garden, trees, water was subject to another dose of the stuff? Or will it be tomorrow? Will it be like the bushfires where we have to get an app and regularly check it to see

if it's safe to go outside? The worry for young mothers with small children will be constant. Relationships will erupt -

A screams "you let the kids outside - they had to stay in today - didn't you see the app - High winds to the east"

B "they just begged me to let them out to play, it was only for a little while"

A "he's covered in dirt - look at him. Are you stupid? We'll need get another blood level test - you take him, I did it last time, a nightmare".

B "How many does he have to have?"

A "He has to keep having them - forever while we live here. That's what they said "there's no safe level of lead exposure to kids"

B "That couldn't be right - who said they could do that? Just let people in Lue all get covered in lead? I thought it was supposed to be regulated n stuff"

A "I'm just telling you that's what they were saying at the school"

The DPE Assessment Report describes the lived experience of these negative social impacts as "manageable". They can be "minimised" through more meetings? The DPE assessment recommends they:

establish and maintain a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) to ensure that the views and concerns of the community through its representatives are considered during the life of the project (p 67)

measures to mitigate negative social impacts (including a workforce accommodation and local businesses and services procurement strategy and blood lead monitoring),

Moreover, blood lead levels can be "monitored" for local residents. The DPE fails to identify who are "local" or to address the mental health impact on the community/parents with children who produce results with elevated lead levels, for which there is no medical means to address such levels and last a lifetime, let alone the burden of responsibility for maintaining a regime of getting their children tested. Where are all these pathology services coming from? Who pays for them?

implement the planning agreement with Council, which includes \$3 million in community contributions (p67)

If the "negative socially impacted" local population extends to 300 people and over the 20year life of the mine, that amounts to a contribution of \$500 per person per year. Who will monitor that

Midwestern Regional Council puts that money toward the benefitting those negatively impacted? More importantly, the effects of degradation of the environment through lead dust and acid mine drainage will last long after the 20years of the mine's life. So why is the amount not "in perpetuity", and why is it so little?

Conclusion

The NSW DPE Assessment provides little in a way of reassuring the population of Lue/Mudgee and Rylstone that it has taken the impact of the Bowdens proposal on their lives, their children lives and the generations to come seriously. Instead, it has attempted to minimise and "kick the can down the road" with promises that forthcoming "management plans" will produce results that make the mine compatible with local communities right to clean air, water, food and amenity. The department has ignored fundamental advice of its own expert consultants, most notably Earthsciences, and when questioned on this glaring omission have shrugged it off with "well academics differ".

Surely the DPE are aware of the MRM PAF rock spontaneous combustion that burnt out of control for a full year, and the AMD that is leaking from the site. Surely they would want to provide expert advice to prevent that happening here. The MRM is 60km from Borroloola. The Bowdens proposal is 2km from Lue, 20km from Rylstone and 30km from Mudgee. And yet here we are with an approval for recommendation with promises of 14 outstanding management plans sometime in the future.

The DPE has excluded data on the vibrancy of the tourism industry and its financial contribution to the Mudgee region's economy. Instead focusing on the closure of the Cement Works in Kandos some 12years ago in an attempt to paint a picture of a town in need of employment opportunities. There are more vacancies than people to fill them currently and in the foreseeable future with the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone offering 3600 positions.

The NSW DPE have recommended a poorly constructed EIS and made an assessment for approval on the basis of a policy rather than the merits of the proposal:

While these direct financial benefits are not as large as many other mining projects and are significantly lower than a typical coal mine would generate, the Department notes the strategic importance of the mine to the NSW economy. In this regard the NSW Government is committed to building on the State's potential to become a major global supplier and processor of critical minerals and high-tech metals, including silver and zinc, and to reducing its reliance on the coal and fossil fuels mining sector. The Bowdens silver deposit is the largest undeveloped silver deposit in Australia and one of the largest globally, and development of the project would be consistent with the NSW Government's vision and commitment. Development of the project would also potentially encourage further investment and development of similar silver deposits, which in turns would generate more jobs and income for the State. (p467)

The NSW DPE has an agenda. Its assessment report has ignored fundamental data to keep the people of Lue/Mudgee/Rylstone/Kandos safe. The report shows a bias toward the proponent and has the fingerprint of the Minerals Council on it. Its scientific analysis lacks academic rigour. It is a FAIL.

I am therefore asking that the Commission reject this proposal.

Reference List

1. Hanigan, I.C., et al., Suicide and drought in New South Wales, Australia, 1970-2007. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*, 2012. 109(35): p. 13950-5.
2. Graeme R Zosky, Ryan F Hoy, Elizabeth J Silverstone, Fraser J Brims, Susan Miles, Anthony R Johnson, Peter G Gibson and Deborah H Yates *Med J Aust* 2016; 204 (11): 414-418. || doi: 10.5694/mja16.00357 Published online: 20 June 2016