

**Submission
No 48**

**IMPACTS OF THE WATER AMENDMENT (RESTORING OUR RIVERS) ACT
2023 ON NSW REGIONAL COMMUNITIES**

Name: Ms Lara Altimira

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Dear Inquiry Members,

I am writing to raise urgent concerns about the potential impacts of the Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023 on regional communities, particularly in relation to the use of unlicensed water under the Excluded Works Exemption. This issue is of great concern to me as I live in the Lue and have property in Camboom the area where Lawsons Creek flows, where the proposed Bowdens Silver Mine plans to use unlicensed water, which will directly impact local water resources, ecosystems, and communities.

Bowdens Silver Mine intends to meet up to 50% of its water needs by capturing unlicensed water in exempt dams, under the Excluded Works Exemption. The proposed dams will capture around 924 megalitres of water per year—water that is contaminated with toxic substances, including silver, lead, and zinc, as a byproduct of the mining process. This is highly problematic, as it means that the mine could use this substantial volume of water without regulatory oversight, and without being held accountable for the environmental impacts.

The most significant consequence of this unlicensed water use is the potential impact on the flow of Lawsons Creek and the surrounding water users in the valley. Lawsons Creek is a vital water source for local communities, farmers, and the natural ecosystem, and the mine's actions could compromise its water quality and availability. Given that Bowdens plans to capture a large volume of water that could otherwise contribute to the flow of this creek, the unregulated use of water from exempt dams will further stress an already delicate water system.

The contaminated water being captured by Bowdens on their mine site poses a significant environmental risk. As mentioned, around 924 megalitres of toxic water will be caught on-site every year. Given the nature of this water—polluted with hazardous mining waste like silver, lead, and zinc—there are serious concerns about the long-term environmental consequences.

The mine has stated that no water from these dams will be released, yet during periods of heavy rainfall or flooding, there is a high likelihood that contaminated water will escape the site. The toxic runoff could enter nearby waterways, including Lawsons Creek and other tributaries, causing severe damage to water quality and threatening the health of local ecosystems. This would not only harm the environment but also undermine the agricultural and domestic water supply for surrounding communities. It is essential that all water, especially contaminated water, be accounted for in a responsible and regulated manner to prevent such risks.

What is happening with Bowdens Silver Mine is not an isolated case. Other projects in New South Wales are also taking advantage of the Excluded Works Exemption, with no clear understanding of the broader consequences for the Murray-Darling Basin. If these exemptions continue to be exploited in this way, it could result in widespread, unregulated water use across the state, leading to compounded risks for water quality, availability, and the overall health of the Basin.

The Murray-Darling Basin is an essential shared resource that serves millions of people, including farmers, communities, and wildlife. Allowing unlicensed water take—particularly contaminated water—from mining operations to go unchecked will only further strain this

already fragile system. The long-term impacts could be severe, leading to not only environmental degradation but also threats to the livelihoods of those who depend on clean water for farming and other industries.

It is crucial that the Excluded Works Exemption be closely scrutinized and regulated to close the destructive loophole that allows for the unlicensed take of contaminated water. The current system fails to account for the full impacts of this practice on our environment, regional communities, and the health of our precious waterways. Water management must be transparent, accountable, and aligned with the goals of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan to ensure that water is used sustainably and responsibly across the region.

The precious water resources of the Murray-Darling Basin must be properly managed, and all water—particularly that which is contaminated by mining activities—must be regulated under the same strict guidelines as other water uses. It is vital that the Inquiry consider the long-term consequences of allowing unlicensed, contaminated water use in exempt dams, and take steps to ensure that this loophole is closed before further damage is done.

I urge the Inquiry to take immediate action to close this loophole and ensure that all water use, including that captured in exempt dams for mining purposes, is properly accounted for and regulated. Allowing unlicensed water capture from contaminated sources threatens not only local ecosystems and communities but also the broader health of the Murray-Darling Basin. This is an issue that cannot be ignored, and it is imperative that we act now to protect our shared water resources for the future.

Thank you for considering my submission. I hope that this Inquiry will lead to stronger protections for regional communities and the environment, and that meaningful steps will be taken to address the risks posed by unlicensed water take in NSW.

Kind regards,
Lara Altimira