

**INQUIRY INTO PERFORMANCE OF THE NSW  
ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY**

**Organisation:** Blue Mountains Conservation Society

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## **Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow**

Thursday 14th August, 2014

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5

Performance of the NSW Environment Protection Authority (Inquiry)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write to you with regards to the inquiry into the performance of the NSW EPA in relation to the Environmental Protection licencing of coal mine waste water effluent and its subsequent licenced discharge's into NSW' waterways.

It is well documented that coal mine waste water discharge heavily degrades water quality and the aquatic ecosystems they are discharged into. Below are just a few peer reviewed scientific papers which document this;

- **Pond, G.J., Passmore, M.E., Borsuk, F.A., Reynolds, L. and Rose, C. (2008) Downstream effects of Mountaintop coal mining: Comparing biological conditions using family- and Genus-level macroinvertebrate bioassessment tools. Journal of the North American Benthological Society, 27, 717-737.**
- **Tiwary, R.K. (2000) Environmental impact of coal mining on water regime and its management. Water, Air and Soil Pollution. 132: 185-199.**
- **Wright, I.A., & Burgin, S. (2009). Comparison of sewage and coal-mine wastes on stream macroinvertebrates within an otherwise clean upland catchment, south-eastern Australia. Water, Air and Soil Pollution, 204, 227-241.**
- **Wright, I.A. (2012) Coal mine 'dewatering' of saline wastewater into NSW streams and rivers: a growing headache for water pollution regulators. In Grove, J.R. and Rutherford, I.D (eds). Proceedings of the 6th Australian Stream Management Conference, Managing for Extremes, 6-8 February, 2012 Canberra, Australia, published by the River Basin Management Society p.p 206-213.**

- **Belmer, N, Tippler, C, Davies, P, J and Wright, I, A 2014, Impact of a coal mine waste discharge on water quality and aquatic ecosystems in the Blue Mountains World Heritage area, 7th Australian Stream Management Conference. (This paper is attached).**

The need for better protection, of perhaps our most important resource (fresh water) is a must. Hard science continually depicts a picture of widespread mismanagement of our waterways and the subsequent heavy degradation of these waterways due to this mismanagement.

This lack of protection of our waterways due to economic pressures is a general lack of stewardship from those who create and regulate Environmental Protection Licences. The constant degradation and ingrained lack of genuine protection of aquatic ecosystems will leave many headaches for future generations to contend with.

A prime example being the Wollangambe River, located in the World Heritage Blue Mountains National Park. Recent studies of this waterway prove heavy degradation from a subsequent coal mine located at its headwaters (report attached separately). This majestic upland waterway, protected in World heritage listed, National Park land is also being mistreated and polluted under licence. Mostly due to the lack of scientific guidance in the process of creating its licence. It also, outside of its license, releases pollutants which it is not licenced to release. This by law is water pollution and the EPA should issue fines and clean up notices relevant to the law they are inclined to regulate and employ.

I ask you, is this protecting the Environment or protecting a Neanderthal resource such as coal?

Legacy pollutants are observed all over the world in regards to waterways and the picture is the same here in Australia. For too long we have seen waterways as our own sordid dumping ground of waste products associated with economic gain firstly and environmental protection (perhaps) secondly.

The Grose River, also located in the World Heritage Blue Mountains National Park is a great example. At the head waters of another World Heritage listed waterway is an abandoned coal mine, which is still, years after closing, polluting this iconic wild Australian River. This company whom mined this coal is long gone, but there degradation still remains and may well remain for ever.

In Australia we have highly intelligent people who could lead the world in sustainable, renewable resources yet we continue to pamper and funnel resources to Neanderthal, industrial age resources. As an Australian it embarrasses me that we don't have the foresight to do what's right and protect our uniquely diverse environment for future generations.

The need for an overhaul of the Environmental Protection Licencing process in relation to wastewater effluent discharges, especially coal waste water effluent in NSW is a must. The faults in regards to protecting waterways and aquatic ecosystems has been documented by Dr Ian Wright. Below are two of his papers regarding the short comings of Environmental Protection Licences.

- **Wright, I.A., Wright S.A., Graham, K., & Burgin, S. (2011). Environmental protection and management: a water pollution case study within the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Land Use Policy, 28, 353-360.**
- **Graham, K and Ian A Wright, I, A 2012, The potential and reality of the environment protection licensing system in New South Wales: The case of water pollution.**

This overhaul should be guided by real science and real scientists not bureaucrats. We have a great plethora of aquatic scientists who can help lead the process. People such as Ian Wright and Peter Davies, who are well respected peer reviewed scientists with real world experience and solutions.

With all the hard science behind these ideas one can only scratch there head at how and why the Precautionary Principle is never used. It's hard to find evidence that coal mine waste water does not degrade our waterways but we continue to perhaps hope one day it will stop degrading our waterways. Good intentions without real, on ground mechanisms will only lead the way to hell. Real science continues to ask the question of what are we doing and why do we continue to do it. But we still continue.

It is time Australia and its largest per capita state start to live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for me it's not about who is wrong, it is that it is wrong and we should stop standing by and turning a blind eye.

Your inquiry panel has the opportunity to lead the State and the Nation in an honest just way. A way that takes into account our future generations. To lead our future leaders into an Ecologically Sustainable future, away from our Neanderthal industrial ways. Our coal resources will soon be gone as for many of us, but the scar on our waterways and the problems they create for our future generations may stay for ever. Our country is more uniquely diverse than just our industrial natural resources. The time for change is now.

I thank you for your time and opportunity to submit my concerns to this inquiry panel. Please remember the power of your decisions. They can create real change for the future of our state and country. A country I am sure we all love and cherish. Let's allow our children and future generations to love and cherish what we have taken for granted for so long, not degrade our

country and leave it up to our children to fix. I'd be a humble pensioner if I could leave my beautiful country in good health for our future generations.

Regards,

Mr Nakia Belmer

Threatened species officer, Blue Mountains Conservation Society.

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