

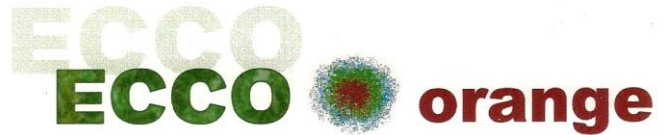
Submission  
No 34

**INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF  
GOLD, SILVER, LEAD AND ZINC MINING ON HUMAN  
HEALTH, LAND, AIR AND WATER QUALITY IN NEW  
SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Environmentally Concerned Citizens of Orange (ECCO)

**Date Received:** 1 September 2023

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**Dr. Amanda Cohn MLC**  
**Chair**  
**Portfolio Committee 2-Health**  
**Legislative Council**  
**Tuesday, September 5, 2023**

**Re: Inquiry into current and potential health impacts of gold, silver, lead and zinc mining on human health, land, air and water quality in New South Wales.**

Dear Dr. Cohn

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. I am doing so as President of ECCO, the Environmentally Concerned Citizens of Orange. Our organisation is a local environment group formed in 2006. Its purpose is to act as an advocate for the environment, and in doing so to support other groups who have major concerns about activities that can impact on their health and that of the local environment. ECCO welcomes this inquiry, as we have been supporting local community groups who either are being, or will potentially be impacted by current and recently approved mining projects. We are greatly concerned that the health of local communities is being compromised as the result of poor and inappropriate approval processes and regulatory policies. We join with these groups in demanding the improvement of procedures and policies relating to both the approval of mining projects and their regulation.

Of particular concern to us is the poor regulation of the Cadia goldmine near Orange and for the poor assessment and approvals process for the recently approved McPhillamy's goldmine near King's Plains, and for the recently approved Bowden" silver lead and zinc mine at Lue.

Key issues ECCO would like addressed include the following:

**1.The prioritisation of human and environmental health**

The bottom line for this inquiry should be the priority of human and environmental health over any other consideration, including economic benefits. To ensure this is the case, any mining project, current or future, must be subject to truly independent assessment that is fully considered in the approval process and is subject to appeal should subsequent research reveal further concerns. This will require a return of the merit appeals process through the New South Wales Land and Environment Court.

Proper health assessment should also include a prior health impact assessment, to be conducted independently. In addition, there should be periodic monitoring of the health of mine workers and local residents. This to be conducted independently and at the cost of the mining company.

Results should be made public. Independently obtained data should provide the key source of information for consenting authorities. Similarly, expert input should provide the basis for environmental health management plans, which should be submitted prior to mining operations being considered for consent. Mining companies should not be allowed to relinquish their responsibilities after the decommission process is completed. Monitoring must continue to occur to ensure that long term health affects due to contamination are not continuing to occur. Heavy metal contamination can have effects on health which can surface years after mining has ceased. It must be made clear to mining companies that they are still responsible any long term health effects caused by their operations.

**2, Regulation needs to be improved**

Safeguarding human and environmental health against the impact of large-scale mining requires stronger regulations than those currently in force. Consequences for non-compliance need to be appropriate for the offence, especially when human and environmental health is involved. This includes the increase in fines for non-compliance as well as the threat of closure. Mines should not continue to operate if there is the possibility of a threat to health.

There are government agencies whose responsibility it is to monitor mining operations and enforce consequences if non-compliance occurs. It is essential that adequate funding is provided for these agencies to operate as they should, Funding for compliance monitoring by government authorities should be provided by mining companies.

**3. Imbalance in the assessment process needs to be addressed**

Mining projects are frequently approved because they are considered as being “in the public interest”. The “public interest “being considered usually is translated as prioritising the economic and employment opportunities of the proposal over concerns about human and environmental health. As a result, little consideration is often given to information provided to the consenting authorities by communities and experts who are opposing the project on health and environment grounds.

ECCO would like to see this inquiry recommend that it becomes mandatory that an independent cost/benefit analysis of each project be conducted, to include the true social, environmental and health costs of the project, as well as its economic benefits.

**4. Expansion of mineral mining in the Central West**

The Central West has been identified as a key expansion area for mineral mining. The assessment of the cumulative impact of mining activity has been very poor in our region. This is particularly in relation to impacts on water quality, water availability, environmental flows and air quality.

Climate change will reduce water availability in the Central West through longer, more severe droughts. We note that both the Bowden’s and the McPhillamy’s mines have been approved with insufficient water to maintain operations, including dust suppression during drought.

If mining and the social, health and environmental aspects are to coexist for the health of those impacted, we trust that your recommendations will include actions on the issues raised above.

Yours Sincerely

Neil Jones, President, ECCO