

**Submission
No 62**

**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**

Name: Ms Stephanie Luke

Date Received: 4 September 2023

To whom it may concern

I am submitting my objections to the development of the Central West as a mining hub due to its incompatibility with pre-existing industries such as agriculture, tourism, historical sites, human habitation and environmental sustainability.

I first moved to Bathurst as a climate refugee from Adelaide, South Australia. Record temperatures and the drying up of the Murray River left me doubting whether that city would still exist in ten years time. Since then they have started the desalination plant and are investing in cooling tree coverage and smart city technology.

Since arriving in the Central West, I have seen my health noticeably deteriorate with doctors and specialists scratching their heads over nausea, diarrhea and stomach cramps. I suffer from unexplained seizures that do not fit the typical epilepsy profile and discovered this month that I have high levels of arsenic in my blood, as well as lower levels of mercury, lead and cadmium.

I approached the EPA to see if some tests could be performed on my rainwater tanks, gutters and soil. They informed me that testing was ONLY taking place within a 15km radius of Cadia Mine where the current dust levels exceed legal levels. This seems very conservative considering the winter winds that we experience. I have been testing these levels at my own expense and wait for results.

About 12 years ago, when I first moved to Bathurst, my car was stuck for several days around Mt Horrible near Sunny Corner. I was forced to rely on a handful of nuts and the local creeks for drinking water. I waited four days to be rescued — I had always been told to stay with the vehicle if stuck out bush.

If there had been some signage alerting me to the nature of those river systems and the level of toxicity that is off the scale (according to Doctor Ian Wright*), I would have attempted to walk out of there rather than sit and wait for help from a dozen dirt-bike riders - thankyou to those guys.

I was a naive newcomer, who knows better now - a clear stream does not mean a safe ecosystem - and my sister, when she heard what had happened, took me straight to hospital, all the while telling me that I was lucky to be alive considering the poisons in the water.

One of the duties of a democratic government is to protect its citizens.

At the moment it is concerned citizens and scientists who inform us of our health risks. My preference is that the government takes on this role. This independent arbitration might become easier if the cap on fines for breaches by mining companies was lifted and the subsidies and donations that move between government and corporations were limited.

Real time reporting of toxicity levels — whether it be in water, air or soil — once a mine is established is too late.

Addressing the actual dangers before a mine is built should be compulsory:

- the impact on water in drought and drying climate,
- defining terms such as "stock quality" drinking water or healthy grazing
- the potential contamination when tailings storage facilities collapse,
- earthquake potential
- flooding impacts
- the true long-term effects of heavy metals in the environment,

- whether towns within 30-50kms will be habitable
- economic compensation that reflects current reality
- legal advice and medical support for those impacted

At the moment proving individual cases is hard, however attempting to sue a government over the toxicity that it exposes its citizens to will become easier as clusters form in our region due to the water loss, dust and contamination and pipeline or storage failures.

The Central West has coal-fired power stations, contaminated river systems, failed tailings storage facilities and un-remediated mine sites as well as earthquakes, bushfires flooding and illness.

People I know are suffering from autoimmune illnesses, cancers, lung disease. They are living in little villages like Wollar in the shadow of three enormous coal mines, unable to drink the river water or the rainwater without filtering it several times. They are unable to move because their property is effectively worthless.

I'm finding New South Wales strangely sinister. I don't feel that those making decisions are taking the health risks seriously. Opponents are muzzled in IPC hearings and have to sit and listen to Regis Resources describe itself as a good, responsible and community-minded corporation, while knowing that their mines in Western Australia have tailings dams that fail due to flooding and that these events are un-insurable under their current policies. Rules of the IPC hearing, prevent the panel taking into account a mining company's reputation, previous mishaps or incidents at other sites. This protection racket fails all the evidentiary rules of court, where such claims can be contested. Closing this loophole at IPC hearings would allow truth to emerge.

We are a food belt in a densely populated regional area and the population is expected to double in size. Our current technology of open cut mining is completely inadequate to keep people, animals and our rivers safe. Building new mines 600m - 50 kilometres from villages and major town centres, crops, grazing and tourist centres is insane.

Thankyou

Stephanie Luke
Bathurst

Articles from the ABC interviewing concerned citizens and scientists inform us of our health risks. My preference is that the government informs and protects us.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/sustainability/sunny-corner-mine-was-abandoned-a-century-ago-it-s-still-a-toxic-deadly-mess-20230704-p5dlkf.html>

[On Sunny Corner water] "Previous tests by Wright showed the water contained arsenic that was several hundred times above the recommended guideline, copper that was close to 10,000 times, lead about 100 times and zinc about 3000 times."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GL9hr5fClGo>
"I wouldn't let me enemy drink from that"

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2019-06-20/tailings-dam-audit-finds-high-failure-risks-across-australia/11223510>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2021-10-16/contamination-concerns-over-90km-wastewater-pipeline/100352866#A%20neighbouring%20Mine>

Regis McPhillamys' gold mine at Blayney, not far from Orange, is in negotiations to take the water from Centennial Coal over an 11-year agreement, across 112 aquifers and waterways...Regis argues the water is "stock quality", and that its transportation poses minimal risk to the surrounding farmland...

But Dr Wright, who has studied the water slated to travel through the pipeline, disputes this and said the risk was too great.

"It's a 80 to 90-kilometre pipeline so it transits a lot of country and there are big elevations involved, which means that there'll be some high-pressure plumbing. I've worked in the water industry; all pipes and pumps at some point fail," he said.

"And when you've got such hazardous levels of metals, even a one to 100 dilution, the sort of nickel-zinc levels in here could be really dangerous to aquatic life and could build up in the soil."

While Regis states on their website ...

"Management of tailings and tailings dams is given paramount consideration in our safety and risk reviews, project development assessments, and land rehabilitation and mine closure planning and implementation.

Design, construction and management of Regis' Tailings Storage Facilities are in accordance with the relevant state regulatory requirements and industry practice."

<https://regisresources.com.au/sustainability/our-environment/dams-tailings-management/>

Regis is still subject to weather events like everyone else on the planet ...

Garden Well At around 6.30am on Thursday 13 February, after 14 hours of unabated heavy rainfall, the mine's flood diversion bund on the south eastern side of the open pit was over topped by flood waters in the creek system flowing from the east-north east. Once the bund was over topped, the flood waters then eroded a section of approximately 30 metres of the bund length. This led to a major inrush of flood waters into the open pit which continued for approximately 26 hours until flows subsided to a level that permitted safe working conditions to close the breached area of the bund. It is estimated that approximately 4.7 million cubic metres of water has flowed in to the pit.

Unfortunately for the company "the flooding events at Garden Well and Rosemont are not insurable events under the company's various insurance policies".

<https://www.australianmining.com.au/regis-resources-suspends-operations-as-mines-flood/#:~:text=Severe%20flooding%20during%20what%20Regis%20called%20%E2%80%9Ca%201,of%20around%2030%20metres%20of%20the%20bund%20length.>