

Submission
No 82

**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: Bathurst Community Climate Action Network

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Current and potential impacts of gold, silver, lead and zinc mining on human health, land, air and water quality in New South Wales

Dear Committee Members,

The Bathurst Community Climate Action Network (BCCAN) is composed of individuals and organisations from the Bathurst region who promote action in response to the Climate Emergency by collaborating with local government and environmental groups across the State to reduce the carbon emissions and improve the quality of Australia's environment. Australia state of the environment 2021 ([dcceew.gov.au](https://www.dcceew.gov.au)) showed a devastating decline in most aspects of Australia's environmental sustainability. This report was deliberately withheld by the previous Federal government until after the election. Among its dire findings was the impact we are having on biodiversity.

In particular we are concerned about the impacts of Scope 1, 2 & 3 emissions from coal mining. While coal mining is beyond the remit of this Inquiry, mining of all kinds impacts upon Australia's carbon emissions and as such contributes to the increase in global emergencies like wildfires, floods, droughts and rising sea levels. These emergencies are not only tragic for many individuals directly concerned, but the costs of the disasters are paid not by the companies who profited from the production of the carbon pollution, but by the public at large. For mining to retain its social licence it should meet at least 3 criteria. Firstly, the methods used should be carbon neutral. Secondly, the product being mined should be of value to the whole community, not just profitable for the company engaged in the mining. And thirdly, the mining should involve minimal local environmental damage.

Our local experience in the Bathurst regions illustrates some of the frightening legacy of mining that hasn't met these criteria. For example, research by Dr Ian Wright at the derelict Sunny Corner silver mine south-east of Bathurst shows a legacy of heavy metal pollution in adjacent creeks and rivers lasting over a century. The Newcrest Mine at Cadia not only draws a great deal of water from the region but, as recent studies by the EPA show, has contributed to air and water pollution that is a threat not only to local residents but to agriculture in the region. The recent failure of one of its huge tailings dams jeopardised the entire river system. The proposed Regis gold mine located at the headwaters of the Belubula River near Blayney will import water of dubious quality from the coal mines in Lithgow and risk polluting the water supplies of rural properties along the Belubula.

At a time when Australia faces a climate emergency and NSW is in the face of an El Nino and accompanying bush fires and water shortage, our rivers are our life blood. Too many of the mines in the area including the ones referred to above are ominously located close to watercourses threatened by leakages and accidents with tailings dams.

Too often approval of mining has been short sighted. While there will always be a need for minerals, and particularly those used in the renewable energy industry, the process of approval of mining ventures is biased in favour of the proponents. Environmental assessment of proposed mining ventures should be undertaken by independent assessors. Policing of environmental requirements has too often been left to the mining companies themselves or to local community activists.

BCCAN supports the submission of the Central West Environment Council of which it is a member. We call for more independent environmental studies of proposed mining operations, strict emissions standards for mines, stronger penalties for breaches of environment requirements of mines, thorough longitudinal health testing of residents near mining operations and regular, independent and transparent monitoring of air and water standards near mines.

Sincerely,

Jack Fry
President, Bathurst Community Climate Action Network.