

Submission
No 94

**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: Mrs Daphne Mendham

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Partially
Confidential

My name Daphne Mendham (nee Marriott). I am 93 years old. I have lived in the Blayney area all my life. I currently live in Blayney having moved from a farm downstream along the Belubula River at Carcoar Dam where we raised our family and farmed fat lambs, beef cattle produced wool and crops such as potatoes and buckwheat. My mother was born at the Dungeon on the land of the proposed Regis McPhillamy Gold Mine, as was her mother before her. My immigrant great great grandparents settled in this area in the 1840's. I have a deep love of this area and the Belubula River.

I am writing as I understand you are inquiring into the impacts of mining on human health , land, air and water quality and I am confused as to how the Independent Planning Commission (IPC) could consider the contamination that Regis will introduce to this area as acceptable.

I am deeply worried for the legacy we will leave generations to come, our grandchildren, great grandchildren and their children. We should not be introducing a pile of poisons and heavy metals to the headwaters of the Belubula River, or contaminating the river and the underground waters, or spoiling the land that is such an abundant source of food production made possible by uncontaminated fertile soils and the fresh waters of the Belubula River catchment area.

I have seen the impact of mines and its effects upon the land, people and agriculture downstream at the Newcrest Cadia Gold Mines. My sons family lived there and the mine is built on the land he once farmed. The mine has decimated one of the most beautiful and productive areas in our region. It has caused deep distress to my family and to those who loved the land. The mine is now polluting the area with heavy metal dust clouds blowing from tailings dams onto neighbouring farms covering livestock, crops and contaminating the air with particles so fine they can be absorbed through skin. Cadia has been fined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for contaminating the air on three occasions but has not rectified the problem in four years and now it appears those who live near the mine have contaminated drinking water/ tank water. Such pollution is not easy to fix and I believe is not fixable in the long term. Once the contaminants and heavy metals have been introduced to the area or exposed through mining, it is there, and it will in time find a way out of its containment. The EPA have issued their maximum fine of fifteen thousand dollars to Cadia. These fines are a pittance when compared to the 75 million dollars that the mine was recently paid in an insurance claim for a collapse resulting from an underground spring. Cadia's lack of action to rectify the damage shows a contempt for the authorities who do not have the power to enforce the protection of land, river and air; it shows a disregard for the people they are impacting and the agricultural industry; and it illustrates how little Cadia cares about the place they are mining. Cadia's concern is to make money and they do not care about the damage they are doing.

This is the nature of mining. At the Dungeon site just outside of Blayney, once the gold is taken, and Regis leaves, the contaminated load stays in the area, who will then will be responsible for ensuring the mines tailings waste remains contained and does not poison the air, groundwater, river, land, and life including people? The Sunny Corner gold mine in the Blue Mountains was closed over a hundred years ago and it remains a 'toxic deadly mess' It leaks heavy metals that are dangerous to the river, it's life and to humans – so dangerous to humans that you shouldn't even put your hand in it. And

whilst earthworks have been done to reduce the contamination the leakage and on-going contamination remains unfixable.

This is the legacy of a gold mine that stopped operations over a century ago and it is a great worry. We cannot eat gold. The soil in the Belubula catchment area is excellent for food production, and the very beautiful old trees on the mine site which will be felled for the mine are a wonderful source for the best honey and cannot be replaced by newly planted trees.

Water contamination is one of my big worries. Regis will bring contaminated water to the area to use. It is water carrying heavy metals that no one else wants and others want to get rid of. They will further poison it with cyanide used to process gold. Cyanide is banned in many countries around the world yet Regis will bring it here. Once the poisoned water from the mine enters the water table, Regis cannot say where it will spread, of course it will spread, we just don't know where and how long this will take. There are multiple springs at the Dungeon and there were many springs along the river before Carcoar Dam was built on our property which is about 10 miles downstream from the Dungeon. Are these underground waters connected? We do not know. is close to Blayney's water supply of Lake Rowland. Lake Rowland is quite small and also has multiple underground springs feeding it adding to my concerns that these underground water may well be connected and that the mine will also contaminate the towns drinking water. We live and die with water. We settle along the edges of rivers for water. You cannot survive without it. What happens underground and the long term effects of contaminating this water is unknown.

The contamination of the river is an immediate worry for those who live downstream. A tailings dam cannot contain the poisoned waters forever, in fact it is designed to seep or else it would flood. In neighbouring areas alone, Cadia's tailing dam wall breached, Browns Creek mine flooded, and Junction Reefs mine is leaking. In the case of Cadia 1.3 million cubic metres of tailings residue escaped. This contamination of heavy metals and poisons goes downstream and when the river floods it spreads out over properties contaminating the soil and contaminating our food supply.

The beautiful Belubula River upon which this town has settled will turn to a trickle as the springs are plugged and the above ground waters are taken for mining. The springs at the Dungeon ensured the Belubula River flowed even when we were in drought. This will no longer be the case. How will the bird and aquatic life be impacted by the changed irregular and contaminated water flow? I feel very sorry for those who farm downstream and rely upon this water for agriculture. They will be in the front line damage done by the mine. But this is not only damage to them as we all need farms for food production, it is necessary for life, and as we have witnessed through these recent years of COVID, food production in Australia is vulnerable already. If the unreliability of water does not ruin their production then they face dealing with long term contamination of food that enters our food chain. The mine will sooner or later breach as other mines have, in a gradual and on-going poisoning of all that is downstream. My grandson with his small family lives and farms on a floodplain near where Belubula & Lachlan Rivers meet. With two mines upstream from him, what is his family's future on that farm?

For those of us who live in Blayney the mine is way too close to our home and has great potential to cause immediate damage to our health and well-being, to the land, water and air. In the short term we can expect dust from the mine from digging to crushing rocks to blasting. In years to come we can expect contaminated clouds of heavy metal/poisons that we are currently witnessing at Cadia. Being close to the mine this dust will settle on the gardens and rooves of our houses. At what point will it no longer be safe to drink the tank water collected from our rooftop? When will we no longer be able to safely eat vegetables and fruit from our gardens? When will this dust begin to show in respiratory illness and heavy metal poisoning in our community?

And then there are the light pollution, noise pollution and physical damage done to our homes which will reflect in the communities physical and mental health. , my daughter works in community health and is well aware of the damages such stress cause to communities health and wellbeing. The additional stresses and threats to human health beyond water, land and air contamination include:

- reflected light illuminating the night sky. Darkness is important to the health of humans, animals, insects and this alone will stress surrounding life.
- noise from blasting and mining activities. I live by the highway. The traffic to the mine in the first instance will increase dramatically as they cart rock from Mandurama. This may be 20 trucks a day and through the night - all night long - along the road by our home. Trucks use airbrakes as they descend into Blayney and gear up as they leave with the sound concentrating as they pass through the valley.
- blasting with the potential to damage houses and infrastructure. I have lived through such blasting when we lived at when the Carcoar Dam was being built. The blasting cracked the walls of our home and we struggled to get compensation to repair the damage. I read recently in the Blayney Shire Chronical that Cadia's mining activities may well have triggered a quake in Orange and that mining can induce earthquakes. Not only are these dangerous in themselves they could breach tailings dam containments creating a different kind of havoc.*

We do not know how long it will take for the contaminated/poisoned water and air to affect the health of those of us and our descendants in the catchment area of the Belubula, but it is inevitable. We do know that such mines leave contamination in their wake – that this contamination is difficult, expensive and probably impossible to clean up and that it is the generations who follow us who will suffer most. In a time when Australia needs safe reliable food sources – we need to ensure the catchment of the Belubula headwaters continues to have clean water, air and land towards preserving our ability to grow clean and plentiful food. We need to do this for ourselves, for our country and for those who come after us.

My daughters _____ and _____ helped me make this submission and together we implore you, please consider the devastating impacts Regis proposal will have on our health, land, water and air and future and do not let them bring contamination and poison this place.

endnote

* William Davis. Blayney Shire Chronicle. 23-8-2023.