

**Submission
No 123**

**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**

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Submission for the 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

I write to submit my observations and experience that not enough is being done to protect the community on the matter of current and potential impacts of mining gold, silver, lead and zinc on human health, air quality and water quality in the Central West of New South Wales. I have been in opposition to the mines and made submissions over the past 8 years.

I am an environmental educator with 9 years of experience working in the Central West, I spend much time listening to anecdotal experiences of contamination, especially around swimming pools and water tanks but also soils. These have come from residents in communities near Cadia and also Millthorpe and Carcoar. I have serious concerns about the health of this region and the environmental impacts of mining.

Heavy metal mining in Central West NSW has a significant legacy of ongoing environmental damage that has not been assessed for cumulative impact. For example, we are only now beginning to pay attention to the Sunny Corner derelict silver mine near Bathurst for which there has not yet been any water testing despite the work of whistle blowers alerting us to this concern.

Current heavy metal mining operations have not been adequately regulated. Cadia air pollution breaches were not recognised until a community campaign was launched and gained a high media profile. Bowden's and McPhillamy's mines are close to populated areas, including schools, that are likely to suffer air pollution with heavy metal contamination. In my own case, an environmental education centre I am setting up in Blayney, stands down wind of the proposed new Regis mine and just beyond that is the catholic primary school. I have serious concerns that the children will be impacted as one of the first places the dust will reach if the mine is eventually started.

We have seen time and again that the assessment and approval process for heavy metal mines is not rigorous or independent. The reliance on proponent's consultant reports, many done through desktop methods, with little or no consideration of other expert reports means that they hold a bias in the planning process.

As we go into another drought, water availability for mining operations and dust management during extreme drought is a significant issue. Cadia mine was short of water through the Millenium drought and recent 2018-2020 intensive drought period. Neither Bowden's nor McPhillamy's mines have sufficient water to manage heavy metal dust pollution during droughts.

I am gravely concerned that the tailings dams design for Cadia mine has demonstrated failure. The proposed tailings dams at Bowden's and McPhillamy's mines are on important waterways and are likely to cause significant heavy metal contamination. Bowden's tailings dam has approval to seep 1.6 ML per day of contaminated water into Lawson Creek. McPhillamy's, on the headwaters of the Belubular will block some 26 springs and many tributaries. My environmental learning centre is just 6km away from this potential devastation.

If children in our community are exposed to heavy metals their lives will be irreparably altered. Nothing could possibly be worth this risk. Heavy metal mining communities such as Mt Isa and Broken Hill have a long-term legacy of health impacts from lead pollution that should not be repeated in Central West communities like Orange, Mudgee Region and Kings Plains.

I recommend:

- That the Department of Planning and the Independent Planning Commission must be resourced to employ independent experts to review information provided by proponents.
- The Environment Protection Agency and Department of Health must play a major role in the approvals process and be better resourced to improve regulation.
- Greater penalties and stronger conditions for mining operations must be in place to prevent heavy metal contamination of the environment and community
- Coal mining also emits heavy metals into the air and waterways. This Inquiry should be extended to include consideration of coal mining pollution.

Sincerely,

Sally Neaves

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