

Submission
No 116

**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: Name suppressed

Date Received: 5 September 2023

Partially
Confidential

Background

I have lived in this community for almost 83 years, raised a family, was a teacher at both Rylstone and Kandos school for 3 decades, operated a farming and eco-tourism business, volunteered in; local health services, Rural Bushfire services and community building programs. I am dismayed that such a project as the Bowdens Lead mine would be allowed to proceed and divide our community and destroy land and pollute our air and waterways.

I have many concerns and are outlined as follows. My concerns relate to all the terms of reference you have cited for this inquiry.

Stakeholder Engagement has not occurred in an appropriate manner with the Lue Residents, existing land users, surrounding tourist operators and Mudgee Regional Tourism.

The Generational Landholders, existing businesses and custodians are to be traded for a total 23 year mine life, should this project go ahead.

How can this possibly be justified?

How short-sighted is this?

Furthermore, since the Ken Henry Report, it's been made clear, that economically, it's a loss. The true cost has NEVER been considered and documented.

Bowdens say that they have had an open-door policy. This does not equal community consultation. Sponsorship of events or activities does not equal community consultation. In this instance, it is more consistent with a "modern-day" bribery rather than good corporate citizenship.

Poor representation of community by Bowdens

Employment

"Jobs, Jobs Jobs," is the constant mantra we hear from Mining proponents. It is an arrogance that suggests these mining and mine related jobs are more important than any other aspect of life and other occupations that will be lost. Currently there are more than 360 jobs available in our region just in the areas of mining and local government alone. Hospitality offers many more. We have a shortage of willing workers. Employment will not be a gain from this mining venture. Furthermore, it creates a detrimental **2-speed economy. The tourism sector, locally, directly employs 930 persons.** This is completely at risk.

- **Who is the mining company**

Bowdens are seeking approval for an open cut lead, zinc, and silver mine. There is no evidence that Bowdens will operate this mine. Will this approval be on-sold and to who? The argument that "it's better for this hazardous processing to happen here under Australian regulations," doesn't serve our country, economically, environmentally, from a health perspective or socially. It flies in the face of what we know to be true.

- **Health** – We have been mortgaging the health of future generations to realise economic and development gains in the present (Whitmee S, Haines A, Beyrer C, Boltz F, Capon AG, de Souza Dias BF, et al.) Environmental pollution contributed to an estimated 9 million deaths and significant losses across the world in 2015 and in fact, *The Lancet* Commission on pollution and health identifies pollution as the largest environmental cause of disease and premature death.

Metalliferous mine dusts and associated potentially toxic elements released into the environment through dust generating mining activities cause adverse health effects to humans. This is especially the case in regions where historic mining has left a significant legacy of exposed metalliferous mine wastes. (Landrigan PJ, Fuller R, Acosta NJR, Adeyi O, Arnold R, Basu NN, et al. 2108).

The WHO has declared air pollution to be the world's largest environmental health risk. There are no safe levels of exposure to particulate matter and even short-term exposure can have adverse effects on health.

Our health, our visitor and animal health, and our operation, that is farming and tourism, will suffer because of this mine.

- **Lead** - is toxic to humans, and it's a universally accepted fact that there is no safe level of exposure to Lead (WHO). Lead is a cumulative toxicant that affects multiple body systems and is particularly harmful to young children. The proponent, Bowdens, suggest that water will be used to suppress the lead dust, however, evidence of an insufficient water resource, especially in times of reduced rainfall, indicate that this will not be possible. This was highlighted by civil engineering and natural resource management, presenter, Shireen Baguley. Her report will be a further submission, for which you can check for reference.
- **Mental health**, as several of the medical doctor presenters indicated, is a highly significant impact to the local community.

Evidence shows that people can experience high levels of anxiety and stress when there is a threat to their region, economic stability, and devaluing land values, even at the proposal stage of a mine. Psychological impacts continue with landscape changes, such as those that occur with large scale mining developments. People suffer solastalgia - the distress that is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment. This Community have already suffered with drought, bushfires, Covid, Floods and now a mining threat.

- **Lack of Technical detail and supporting data**
 - **Ground and surface water** - Impacts to ground and surface water will be significant and have not been adequately assessed in the EIS nor

addressed in the NSW Department of Planning's Assessment Report. Refer to Shireen Baguley's Report

Groundwater impacts will be significant for downstream water users, who will have less water to use and face serious risks of water contamination because of toxic tailings seepage at an apparently acceptable amount of 1.6 mega litres/day, and/or acid mine drainage upstream. Townships such as Gulgong will have their town water supply at risk of poisoning.

Acid mine drainage (AMD) Key technical detail surrounding the Proponent's acid mine drainage management is inadequate and unresolved, as highlighted by the Earth Systems review detailed in the Department's Assessment report. AMD risks would burden the region with a toxic, permanent legacy, in contradiction to principles of intergenerational equity and ecologically sustainable development. There is a substantial disparity between Bowdens statements for AMD management and Earth systems statistical analysis. The tailings dam will leak – there is nothing to stop it. It's not if, it's just when.

- **Bowdens Mine is an Uneconomical Proposition.** The Assessment Report excludes any meaningful mention or exploration of the role tourism plays in the Lue and broader Mudgee, Rylstone, Kandos region, and in turn, fails to assess the impacts of an open cut lead mine on the future viability and sustainability of the visitor economy and tourism sector. Tourism and the visitor economy represents \$170 million to our region and which we, personally, are part of.
- **Lack of Due Diligence by the NSW Department of Planning (DPE)** A significant cost and burden has been placed on the community with the additional huge costs of employing the IPC to do the due diligence we expect and pay DPE to do. Unfortunately this turned out to be a very expensive farce. The conditions and assessment report put forward by the DPE are inadequate, and do not impose sufficient controls or protections for the community. There are no penalties for exceedances.

The DPE are tasked with the responsibility to make critical assessments and seek clarity from applicants that answer key issues. "Streamlining processes" to allow for faster approvals, is irresponsible, especially where activities will have consequences in perpetuity. The approval with conditions, given to Bowdens' Lead, Zinc & Silver mine demonstrates an extremely poor-quality assessment. Assessments such as this, bring a distrust to the system and makes one question if corruption is involved.

Current “Best Practice” is now clearly **NOT** good enough. Practice needs to be brought up to date with our current knowledge and expectations of safety, social impact, and environmental impact. It is time to make a stand. I, along with many others, ask the Committee Members to bring about, a lifting of the bar, so that mining practises consider appropriately, the real impact on people and landscape. The current standards or “Best Practice” are no longer acceptable. Stop the rape and pillage of the land for “critical minerals,” minerals of significance,” “rare earth minerals and their potential economic opportunities.” It seems the state is in a drunken stupor, “streamlining processes” for an artificial and questionable, economic gain. The real costs are being ignored.

- **Transport Inadequacies/lack of Risk Mitigation** Mined materials and processing chemicals will be moved as a slurry, by B-Double truck, along the Lue Road and through Mudgee. No upgrade to the road, no procedures for accidents and spills, no mitigation for the risks.
- **Aboriginal Heritage Destruction** Of the 52 aboriginal artefacts surveyed on the site, 25 will be destroyed if the mine proceeds. A local Wiradjuri Elder asked “How many more funerals do we have to go to?” The trauma to the land, the destruction of songlines, rock shelters and sites of significance. When will this assault stop? Commissioners, please speak with our local Wiradjuri people and please stop the “gag orders by mining proponents.” Gag orders effectively prevent Aboriginal people objecting to destruction of heritage sites.
- **Rehabilitation** – It is unsatisfactory that this mine has no rehabilitation plan. According to a report, *The Dark side of the boom: What we do and don't know about mines, closures and rehabilitation in New South Wales (2017)*, by the Australian Institute, adequate funding has not been allocated for rehabilitation. “The costs of rehabilitating the mines in NSW run to billions of dollars. The burden must be included in the project proposal. The Mineral Council, the mining companies, and government departments are not facilitating the transparency this issue deserves.”

“There is no example of a major open cut mine site being successfully rehabilitated in NSW. There are, however, hundreds of abandoned mines in the state, with the NSW Auditor General expressing concern that derelict mines ‘may represent the largest category of contamination liability for the NSW Government.’”

While there is a huge financial liability to the state, there is a much greater real cost to our people and our environment. It is prudent of the Committee to recommend that Bowdens submit an appropriate rehabilitation program and set aside the funds as a bond for this. If this is done in a meaningful way, and if the economic value presented at the hearing is correct, this mine will not be an economic proposition.

Bowden's economic viability is only such because this cost amongst others has not been accounted for.

The recent report: *Independent Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* – Final Report by Ken Henry, Dr John Keniry, Prof Michelle Leishman and Mike Mrdak details the natural environment is now so damaged that we must commit to 'nature positive' if we are to have any confidence that future generations will have the opportunity to be as well off as we are.

This implies a major reset in public policy thinking, which many will find challenging. Even though sustainability concepts have been central to policy development for more than a generation, many in the community, and even within government circles, still struggle with the notion that policies to promote human progress should recognise any constraints, social or environmental. Yet the fact of humanity's dependence upon the quality of the biosphere, in both social and economic dimensions, is as immutable as the laws of physics. The case for giving primacy to environmental repair is inescapable. Our future depends upon it.

To the Chair, Deputy Chair, and Members of the Committee,

we, the people impacted, are asking for:

- **Fair and just practices.**
- **Accurate merit assessments, with complete detail and data need to be in place before any approvals are sought and the opportunity to challenge if not provided. The mere fact that several other well-funded experienced proponents have walked away from this proposal should send up red flags.**
- **The key issues are the key issues and best known by the local community that have had the local life experience and the burden of investigation**
- **A net and true analysis of economics and employment. Gross economics and employment data attributed to the project CANNOT be the most significant weighted decider.**

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