

**Submission  
No 144**

**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 Susan Barry  
**Date Received:** 5 September 2023

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Dear Sir/Madam,

We are local residents to the “mega-mine” at Cadia, NSW. Our family has been on this land for over 100 years. Our residence is located on a hill looking out to the Cadia mine. We have had to watch it grow since its inception to have more and more impact on the local area. Our submission to the inquiry is by way of general observations and suggestions.

1. We are alarmed by the constant and ever increasing amount of dust from the waste rock dump, the tailings dams, the mine site in general and the vent rises from the underground operations. As we write this submission at 5.30 pm on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> September, the mine site is blanketed in a thick pall of dust which is being transported on to residences, farmland and livestock to the west of the mine.

We have often complained to the mine about the dust but, while they can keep the complaints “in-house” and out of the media, no meaningful action eventuates. The dust must be particularly harmful to the mine workers who work in this high concentration of pollution but we are not aware of blood, hair sampling or any other monitoring of the health of the mine staff. This despite the mantra of the company that “nothing is more important than the health of the local community.”

After very dry weather and a strong wind change the dust coming off the mine can be very thick, but never seems to trigger any exceedances because of the way the measurements are averaged, How can this be?
2. We do not have the expertise to be able to speculate on the effect of very large volumes of dust pollution on land, soil, livestock and human health, but we can assure the committee that this issue at Cadia has continued for many years. It has been going on since the dumping of waste rock from the original open pit mining. We were able to watch this activity continuing even in strong and variable winds with little regard for the local community. This activity was going on more than 30 years ago – one can only imagine that, with the growth of the operation, pollution is accumulating.
3. We were recently prompted by the Cadia Community Sustainability Network (a small band of dedicated local residents) to have our drinking water tested. The tanks were very full after recent rainy periods so the water at the tops of the tanks was clear and safe. What was alarming were the results for the sludge which is inevitably found at the bottom of rainwater tanks. The level of lead was 12 times the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, Chromium was 4 times the ADWG and Nickel 3.4 times. We don't believe there is anything in our roofing, guttering or pipe material which could be the cause of this. With no proof, we can only surmise that this has accumulated over the years from mining dust.
4. Monitoring and compliance

The fact that the maximum allowable fine from the EPA to a mine is \$15,000 is laughable and the fact that mining companies self- regulate and self-monitor just adds to the charade.

Our suggestion is to establish an independent authority or a subsection of the EPA to monitor mining activities in real-time (by 24 hour video/ telemetry etc.) so it is highly

automated, technologically advanced and tamper-proof. Mines cannot be trusted to monitor themselves!

In this system we propose:-

- When a mining operation is close to an exceedance (which might be from dust, chemical pollution, noise, light etc.) they would be notified automatically.
- Should they continue without immediately remediating and an exceedance occurs they should be shut down immediately for a minimum of three days and be compelled to publish the exceedance in the local media. They must then take whatever remedial action is required to solve the problem.
- If the operation starts up after three days and then causes another exceedance of pollution they should be shut down immediately for a further three days.

The rationale being that fining a “mega-mine” is a joke to them but being shut down and having their “social licence” damaged would carry some real weight.

#### 5. Response of Government Agencies

In regard to the recent concerns about dust pollution in the air and heavy metal contamination in drinking water, the responsible Government agencies were extremely slow to react. They needed to be prompted by a proactive group of concerned local residents who commenced their own water testing with the wider local community and publicised their concerns in the local media. However, since their recent involvement, their diligence and responsiveness has been impressive.

#### 6. Current decommissioning

Mines must be able to be held accountable for their actions for generations after their closure. They should not be able to just walk away and have tax-payers pick up the tab for their negligence. No mine should be allowed, for instance, to leave an open pit or flooded subsidence void and argue that it is not economical to repair the permanent damage to the environment.

Numerous examples exist of inadequate post-mining rehabilitation. In this area seepage from old mine workings is still potentially polluting water courses. E.g. the old Sunny Corner mine near Bathurst and the Oceania gold mine at Junction Reefs (there is still concern at Junction Reefs about Cyanide still potentially leaching into the Belubula River)

#### 7. Cumulative effect of mining

The likely cumulative effect of mining in a region needs to be considered before an approval is granted. Mines are enormously destructive to the land, water, community and many local businesses. Mining companies “cash for no comment” strategies skew the local social fabric and mines and miners are transient.

The much-hyped “mining industry job” often just deprives another local business of their staff.

Another subtle aspect of the cumulative effect of mining is the constant expansion and constant “modifications. The “mega-mine” at Cadia is up to Modification 15. Mines only submit a small fraction of their real agenda for initial approval and then achieve the rest by “modifications” (i.e. mission creep) The proposed Regis mine at Blayney

is a classic example. Regis are already talking about processing ore from other sites and an expansion at “Discovery Hill”. In many ways modifications have much more impact than the original proposal and allow a much greater cumulative impact by default.

While examining the cumulative effect of mining, the number of exploration licences being granted must be considered. The granting of an exploration licence is not just a harmless, objective, bureaucratic procedure. It has real world consequences. The moment an exploration licence is granted the threat to local rural enterprises begins, with uncertainty, fear and hopelessness being common reactions. There are also the real world consequences around investing time, money and energy into threatened enterprises.

Mining has a disproportionate influence at both State and Local Government levels. Some mines almost set themselves up as alternative local governments to further their own ends. Mines project this image through the local printed media which their financial input can significantly influence.

Sue Barry and Tom Harris  
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