

Submission
No 152

**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

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Partially
Confidential

Submission to the Parliamentary 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 am a landholder in the Rylstone region, a voter and a taxpayer. Despite a family crisis and illness I am yet again spending hours of my time making a submission in (hopefully not) a vain attempt to convince government the long term health of our water resources and environment which support the health of our citizens, our ability to feed ourselves and ongoing economic enterprises such as beef, wool, olives and tourism to name a few, is more important than short term mining projects which benefit only a few. Ever since the beginning of BHP mining magnates have had an undue influence on government policy to the detriment of communities and our environment.

Due to unwillingness to spend more than a couple of hours on this submission my statements will not be referenced but I am confident others will have done so and your own staff will no doubt have sought out relevant research papers on all the topics to be addressed.

1. That Portfolio Committee No. 2 inquire into and report on current and potential impacts of gold, silver, lead and zinc mining on human health, land, air and water quality in New South Wales, in particular:

(a) the impact on the health of local residents and mine workers, including through biomagnification and bioaccumulation.

Despite conditions placed on mine consent and assertions of mining companies mine dust does impact the surrounding areas. The plume from Mt Isa mine is carried hundreds of kilometres to the west on the prevailing winds. Just recently we have the example of Cadia Gold mine near Orange.

Closer to home residents are extremely concerned about the recent approval of Bowden's Silver (Lead) mine just 2kms from Lue Public School. There is no safe exposure to lead for children yet the company's stated response to an exceedance of lead dust emissions will be to, within seven days, drop a leaflet about lead exposure to affected residents. Really? We know there is insufficient water for truly adequate dust suppression: previously two proponents walked away from the project because of lack of water and initially Bowdens also acknowledged this when they proposed piping excess water from Ulan mine 80 kms away. Now they have magically found enough water – by producing flawed data and ignoring scientific advice. More about that issue below.

I would like to point out the anthropocentric bias of the terms of reference of this enquiry by not including the impact on plants and animals with which we share our world and whose continuing health are crucial for our own.

(b) the impact on catchments and waterways, affecting both surface and groundwater destined for local and town water supplies, including rainwater tanks, and on aquatic biodiversity

Water is a scarce resource in this country but it has been commoditised and now goes to the highest bidder. There is no holistic framework for its management that acknowledges what should be priorities: adequate water first for humans, food and the health of the water resource, and then for long term economic enterprises. Mining should come after that, but government policy (expansion of minerals mining) comes first. A recent example is the approval of Bowdens Silver Mine at Lue You will have received many submissions concerning the flawed data used regarding water (see paper by Shireen Baguley). Bowdens admitted they would reduce flows into Lawson's Creek by 10.9% but did not acknowledge that in dry times this would severely affect downstream water users. Yet this has been approved. How can this be allowed? Others will be giving more details on this issue.

The recent publicising of the contamination of rainwater tanks from the Cadia Mine highlights the blatant disregard by government and mining companies of this kind of contamination. In addition, no doubt you will have been given numerous examples of acid mine drainage which continue to pollute long after the mining company has disappeared. At Lue they are proposing a toxic tailings dam over a fault line. Really? We need to acknowledge the true cost of mining that must be borne by the mining companies and not the environment.

(c) the impact on land and soil, crops and livestock, including through biomagnification and bioaccumulation

Once land is polluted it takes decades to centuries for health to be restored. Really robust (and therefore necessarily expensive) conditions need to be imposed to ensure there is no contamination. These conditions need to be adequately monitored (more expense) and response swift. To date this is not happening. Once lead dust falls on pastures or olive trees, those industries are essentially destroyed. Yet such a risk has been considered acceptable. Why?

Near Cadia, residents are already concerned that dust from the mine site and leaking water from the breached tailings storage facility has polluted land and soil, crops and livestock. And there are numerous examples of pollution from coal seam gas.

(d) the adequacy of the response and any compliance action taken by the regulatory authorities in response to complaints and concerns from communities affected by mining activities

Woeful! See recent media coverage of the Cadia Mine issue for just one example. Juukan Gorge and disregard for scientific evidence in relation to water availability at Lue are two more examples and I'm sure this inquiry will be hearing about lots more.

(e) the effectiveness of the current regulatory framework in terms of monitoring, compliance, risk management and harm reduction from mining activities

The current framework, in which mining entities are supposed to 'self-monitor' is a travesty. And the recent exposures in the media of events at Cadia are just one example. And I repeat, the shocking acceptance of a woefully inadequate "plan of management" for any exceedance

of lead dust emissions: within seven days, drop a leaflet about lead exposure to affected residents. Really?

(f) the effectiveness of current decommissioning and rehabilitation practices in safeguarding human health and the environment

Best Practice examples of proper mine rehabilitation are few. Charbon Coalmine is one such rare example but most mining companies appear to be able to simply walk away from the toxic mess and environmental destruction they have created. Because of past inadequate regulation there is a toxic legacy future generations will be dealing with for centuries. This has to change and the cost must be paid for by the miners.

(g) the effectiveness of New South Wales Government agencies to regulate and improve outcomes including: (i) the measurement, reporting and public awareness (ii) the provision of various protective materials (iii) the ability to ensure the health of at-risk groups (iv) the suitability of work health and safety regulations, and (v) the capacity to respond within existing resources (vi) the adequacy of existing work, health and safety standards for workers

To date, New South Wales Government agencies appear to have been spectacularly incompetent and inadequate in regulating mining activities in the state. No doubt this is partly due to understaffing but one needs also to acknowledge the power of the mining lobby.

(h) whether the regulatory framework for heavy metals and critical minerals mining is fit for purpose and able to ensure that the positive and negative impacts of heavy metals and critical minerals mining on local communities, economies (including job creation) and the environment are appropriately balanced

I quote from a friend's submission as she has already eloquently expressed my thoughts: To date it does not appear that the regulatory framework is fit for purpose. There is insufficient regulation to protect human life, animals and the environment, to protect water and prevent air pollution. We may need some mining activity to produce minerals required for modern life, but the balance between the need for these minerals and the rights of humans, animals and the protection of our environment are out of balance. Currently there is too much emphasis on mining at the expense of environmental protection, and care for local communities and the environment. Minerals mining activities generally provide negligible amounts of employment, especially employment for local residents.

I hope that the NSW Government listens to what people are saying and actually does something to curtail the totally unacceptable state of mining and mining 'remediation' that exists today. It seems that right now, the profits of multinational companies, and profits to shareholders, trump the health and wellbeing of humans, animals and the natural world surrounding these toxic mine sites, and this must change.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I implore members of this Inquiry to take note of the serious concerns of the people of NSW and recommend a major overall of

the approach to mining in this state. This will necessitate taking on the powerful mining lobby and forcing them to put the care of the environment above profits.