

**Submission
No 158**

**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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BOWDENS LEAD/ZINC/SILVER MINE

This project has been a bit of a 'sleeper', ticking along in the local background for many years, with changing owners, several assessment processes back and forth. Many thought this project had been shelved. So, it was a surprise to learn that it had 'quietly' progressed to the Independent Planning Commission stage.

Like most members of the public, I'm no expert on mining and the intricate processes involved in extracting minerals from the earth. I also acknowledge there is a need to extract various minerals from the earth to produce the multitude of consumables the modern world needs.

These minerals have to come from somewhere – we can't be hypocritical NIMBYs. But I'm a firm believer that it's not about the action itself, it's about the intention and execution of that action.

So like a lot of others I've recently had a very steep learning curve on the Bowdens Silver Mine project and have spent a lot of time seeking out information – from both sides.

Having sat in on the Public Hearing for several days and listened to experts from both sides of the fence I've come away with many concerns regarding the suitability, proposed methods of production and treatment of waste surrounding this project. These are outlined below. I'm also conscious that your time is precious, so rather than regurgitate reams of expert content (which you have read already) I'll dot point my areas of concern.

I should also add that I'm deeply invested in the food and wine culture of our town, having worked in many facets of the industry for over twenty years and respond predominately from this point of view.

TOURISM

- The tourism industry appears to have been completely overlooked in the assessment process.
- Over 900 people are currently **directly** employed in the visitor economy in the Mid-Western Regional Council region (MWRC)
- Bowdens are saying they will employ 131 people during construction and 210 on site for the period of 16.5 years, the active life of the mine. Are their mine jobs worth more than the existing tourism jobs?
- In 2019 the region had 691K visitors, this grew to over 800K in 2021/'22
- Tourism is a very large part of our economy and is rapidly overtaking coal mining in terms of total regional earnings.
- Our Mudgee Regional Tourism Inc. (MRTI) is a very proactive organisation with a unique structure (compared to other VICs in other councils) and they have many runs on the board. By now you will have heard that we have been awarded Top Tourism Town, not once but twice, in the last couple of years, this has never happened before. A measure of the love people have for the region.
- MRTI have very successfully implemented the Mudgee Destination Plan and the next section of this plan is Wellness Tourism – strongly linked to Agritourism, Food and Wine, Health and Indigenous based tourism sections.

- We are very concerned that tourism to our area will be forever damaged by the impacts this mine will have on the regions natural beauty, with increased air, water, noise and visual pollution.
- There have also been many concerns raised regarding the adverse implications for biodiversity and on waterways, bog sinks and natural springs in the area.
- Dark sky tourism will be severely compromised for those in the surrounding areas because of the constant lighting of the site and vehicle movements.
- Wine and food business will be forced to undertake testing of their products. This will alter their profitability and the current perception visitors to the region hold.
- Accommodation providers will be required to 'wet-wipe' walls, floors and surfaces to remove lead dust build up. As we know there is NO safe lead levels especially where children are concerned.
- There are also concerns of road safety along the Lue Road, a well-travelled tourist route from Mudgee, through Rylstone and onto Kandos. This narrow winding road will be shared with over sixteen trucks a day, some carrying lead laden slurry, this could be a very dangerous situation. These trucks will pass though Mudgee and surrounds on their way to Botany Bay and to the train destined to Port Pirie.

AGRICULTURE

- We also have thriving agricultural, food and wine culture here in the MWRC region.
- The local Mudgee Farmers' Market is a community based NFP organisation. It is a prized tourist attraction but more importantly it's a family affair, it's locally based, it's grass roots production, it's predominately organic, it's highly valued and it is uniquely ours!
- Our guests and customers know our food products are lovingly handmade, small batch production, always locally grown, often originating from back yards, wild harvested or collaboratively grown.
- This region is famous for its top-quality crops including, olives both table and oil, (internationally renowned) cherry production, pomegranates, figs, grapes for award winning wines, indigenous foods, stone fruits, vegetables and citrus. Along with cattle, sheep, poultry and pigs.
- We are collectively worried about the affects this mine will have on these growers and producers, small and large, many of whom live close to the mine or along the relevant water courses such as Lawson Creek and the Cudgegong River.

WATER CONCERNS

- It appears the Lawson Creek cannot supply all the water requirements for this project as outlined. Bowdens themselves have admitted they will need to scale back during drought times. How will this affect the surrounding farmers' water supply?
- The potential for acid mine drainage seems very real.
- How quickly can the mine react to bushfires and dust storms to effectively control all forms of pollution?
- Nowhere in the world has the proposed 1.5 mm thick geo-tarp solution been used, nor tested in a mine of this size, the largest silver mine in Australia. What could possibly go wrong?

- The Tailings Dam needs to be deep and NEVER overflow and NEVER leak. How can anyone guarantee the earth will not move or crack? Mudgee is full of houses with subsidence cracks! This dam straddles a major geological fault line (crack) above the water table at the beginning of the Lawson Creek, which flows into the Cudgegong River at Mudgee.
- Bowdens have already recognized that leakage from this dam will continue after they have finished mining. What happens then, who becomes responsible then for contamination?
- Already there is discussion on the surface area not being enough and having to widen this to achieve the required evaporation levels. Has this been allowed for dollar wise?
- At the end of the project there is no plan to drain or remove the tailings dam, meaning it will remain there forever – a toxic legacy!
- This project has not met the SEERS conditions – working it out ‘on the fly’ is not fair or safe for anyone.
- We are very concerned the water modelling for this project in its current format has not been fully investigated.

LEAD DUST CONCERNS

- Dust travels!!! There may be so called ‘safeguards’ in place to limit dust travel, but dust by its very nature travels, check out any front verandah, roof or vehicle in the region! Anyone who has lived through the recent dust storms that travelled all the way to Sydney and across the Tasman will attest to this.
- There are huge ramifications for Regional Producers, the fine particulate lead dust will get into the food chain in both Lue and further afield.
- We saw how far smoke travelled in 2020, we saw how long it ‘sat’ in our region (over 63 days) we saw it roll in, in huge cascading waves and then suck out of our valleys. It was very visual!
- That smoke was from the Gospers Mountain fire which was over 127 kms away. It was on our grapes, it was on our produce, this lead laden dust will act the same way, depending on prevailing weather conditions.
- The dust will also travel and infiltrate the fruit and vegetable crops grown in paddocks, back yards etc.
- It will be concentrated up the food chain in the production of beef, eggs, lamb and pork.
- Likewise for honey production – bees and other insects will transport the lead laden dust from flower to flower and then into the hives. Mudgee is known as the “land of wine and honey”.
- The company has already admitted it will need to scale back water harvesting during drought, therefore not enough water for adequate dust suppression.
- This project in my humble opinion is not ready for approval. There are many unanswered questions and untried ‘solutions’ to dealing with the waste products. I believe the assessment process is flawed and needs further investigation.

God help the community of Lue with its unique little school, will they become another Bylong Valley, Wollar or Ulan Village situation? Bowdens have divided this community by acquiring or optioning certain critical properties, (a tried-and-true method) thus ‘starving’ out other residents. They purchased the local pub, further creating an ‘us and them’ culture. Will Lue

suffer a 'death by a thousand cuts' a slow strangulation of a town till everyone is choked out and leaves – to become just a footnote in the pages of our history?

This is just the thin edge of the wedge, they are already exploring further up this beautiful, agriculturally rich valley for gold and other minerals – please consider carefully the legacy this decision could leave.