

INQUIRY INTO BENEFICIAL AND PRODUCTIVE POST- MINING LAND USE

Organisation: Mudgee District Environment Group
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Inquiry into beneficial and productive post-mining land use:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=3046#tab-submissions>

Submission from Mudgee District Environment Group

Mudgee District Environment Group (MDEG), based in the Mid-Western Region council area in the Central West of NSW is working for the conservation of our natural heritage and a sustainable future for our children.

This submission comments on the matters within the Terms of Reference.

(a) the benefits of having multiple successive land uses including the positive benefits for local communities and the economy, business, industry, and the broader state

Post-mining land use planning must give a priority to restoring the natural environment and ecosystem processes as much as possible. Mining has irreversibly damaged these critical elements of our world that are necessary for human survival. There will be no positive benefits for communities, the economy, business, industry or the broader state unless we acknowledge and ameliorate the mining damage and prioritise reinstating the natural landscape functions that sustain humanity. Such a goal is likely impossible considering the current damaged state of ecosystem function but that does not diminish the urgency and importance of the objective.

Addressing environmental restoration work must begin with careful analysis of groundwater flows and landscape hydration. The predictions and water modelling used by the mines in various modifications and extensions over the life of the mine should not be relied upon as they are notoriously inaccurate and regularly revised. Current quantitative and qualitative records of groundwater interception, overland flow, water storage and water releases must be analysed against pre-mining data. The pre-mining data investigations should include local landholder, council and agency observations and records. Groundwater experts and hydrogeologists will be needed to advise the effects of mining cessation on water flows, water quantity and quality. An understanding of the post-mining changes to water regimes and water quality must be the foundation of any subsequent planning. The loss of fresh groundwater within the catchment will likely sterilise future land uses – a risk that must be fully assessed prior to future planning.

(b) changes in land use potential and demand in established or traditional mining areas, particularly those generated by the decarbonised economy, renewable technology, manufacturing, defence, skills, and training

The mines in the Mudgee area are Glencore's Ulan, Yancoal's Moolarben and Peabody's Wilpinjong. They, like many other mines were established in agricultural and bushland settings. It is appropriate that these areas be

returned to that prior land use. Agricultural land and bushland are both high value land uses that have declined in established mining areas. Along with the loss of pre-mining land use, there has been accompanying losses of community, social cohesion, and the availability of experiences in the natural world. Research is clear that these losses have cumulative negative impacts on human health and society. Restitution of these losses must be a priority.

Buffer zones and offsets must be retained as natural vegetation.

(c) opportunities for investment and growth in training and skills in established or traditional mining areas

There will be high demand for skills and training in landscape restoration. This presents an opportunity for TAFE and other training institutions to create innovative facilities and collaborative research centres. The planning for this should include First Nations people.

(d) opportunities to encourage innovative post-mining land uses

Any post-mining development will require a strict consideration of existing pollution in dust and water (see also comments in (a)). A full regional assessment must be undertaken to ensure the health and safety of all workers and potential planned land uses. The experience at Cadia mine near Orange provides a salient example of this necessity.

The development of pumped hydro may be a positive move, with thorough investigation of initial water supply, quality and replenishment.

With regard to the mines named above MDEG does not support:

1. unlocking surrounding land for residential dwellings, amenities, environmental and educational facilities – except to restore localities and encourage repopulation of the area with a return of pre-mining land uses is that is compatible with subsidence risk.
2. exploration of former and legacy mining sites with modern mining technology to explore deposits in tailings and closed sites
3. the development of sites for use for advanced manufacturing, commercial and industrial use

(e) how to ensure the benefit from innovative post mine land uses are shared between the community and mine operators

MDEG considers that no financial benefit should accrue to mine operators post mining. It is the mines that have caused irreversible environmental damage and long-term society and personal upheaval. They must be responsible for post-mining landscape restoration and provide all assistance to reinstate the attributes of the pre-mining landscape and community. This must be mandated as a condition of the mine decommissioning.

MDEG believes that mine operators and NSW Government together must facilitate the return of some mine-owned lands such as buffer zones, to First Nations people. This process should occur in collaboration with First Nations people.

(f) the expectations of mining communities in relation to post-mine land use, and how to balance this with innovative reuse of existing infrastructure

There must be open, genuine consultation with affected communities. These means consultation at Collaborate and Empower levels of the [International Association for Public Participation Spectrum](#).

(g) the need to develop a robust independent regulatory framework to maintain and advance best practice in this area

This matter is perhaps the most significant. The regulatory framework that mines currently operate under is flawed and skewed to the advantage of the mine operators. An independent, statutorily empowered and well-resourced public authority is essential to the positive outcomes that are possible as this major transition occurs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.

Sincerely

Rosemary Hadaway

Chair

Mudgee District Environment Group