

**INQUIRY INTO BENEFICIAL AND PRODUCTIVE POST-  
MINING LAND USE**

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**Submission to the inquiry into post-mining land uses:**

The Ulan/Wollar area currently is the largest coal producer in NSW. The Glencore, Peabody and Yancoal mines operating in this area all are seeking further expansions. They are choosing and being enabled to further expand coal mining operations despite there being well established, indisputable evidence we are facing catastrophic change, consequent in large part from the mining and burning of their product. Doctor Joelle Gergis has called out perpetuating the heating of our planet as an “intergeneration crime against humanity.” Actions of coal mining companies along with their allies in Government, Public Administration and the Media, made in full knowledge of this scientific advice, should be borne in mind when evaluating their professions of commitment to the welfare of future generations.

We need to plan now to prepare for change, and to ensure that there is support for workers and a strong plan for new industries and new opportunities. Overseas experience has shown the folly of relying on multi-national coal companies to act in the community’s interest above the maximisation of profit. Post mining strategies need authority over mining companies to direct tangible results, this is applicable to point (g) of the inquiry’s terms of reference.

The first priority for an effective post mining strategy is to stop making things worse. The message sent by Government approval of new coal projects and their seemingly endless expansions and modifications, encourages local businesses to take on further debt and keep on investing in coal support infrastructure. Thus reducing the region’s economic diversity and exacerbating future economic shock.

On the positive side, areas such as Ulan/Wollar have good quality road and rail links, high voltage power links, optic fibre cable links, access to a skilled workforce, access to reliable water and large amounts of now vacant land. There is high potential here for solar and wind farms, pumped hydro, solar thermal or cultivation of bio energy crops. Along with this energy producing potential are associated co-generation opportunities utilising surplus heat and energy. However there is a danger plans appearing to offer future establishment of post mining industries will be used as a ‘get out of gaol card’ to absolve mining companies from their obligations to replace or compensate for loss of biodiversity or the permanent degradation of our waterways.

Current approvals in the Ulan/Wollar area already permit more than 50 million tonnes of coal extraction until 2035. Enough profit has been made here, in a climate emergency all resources need to be concentrated on optimising what remains of community infrastructure, biodiversity and water resources for rehabilitation. Applications for further expansion of coal mining should be rejected and existing operations cut back wherever possible. For example the village of Wollar has had many houses bulldozed by Peabody CM and the local shop and school have closed. Currently there is an application to explore and mine all around the village. Points (iv.) and (f.) of the committee’s terms of reference would be furthered by leaving this infrastructure intact and viable (not to mention preserving the existing in use RFS fire shed and Wollar community hall) by refusing further expansion of Peabody’s already vast open cut operations. Yancoal mining operations are seeking to destroy Koala habitat and sources of fresh groundwater feeding the Goulburn River with open cut expansions planned to go right up to the Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve, destroying the last section

of the Moolarben River valley. Yancoal also are seeking final approval for extracting the final 5 panels of their Underground 4 mine (predicted gain of around 5 million tonnes of coal) mining up to 200 metres of the Goulburn River, collapsing strata 500 metres from the iconic cliffs of the Drip and Corner Gorges (50,000 visitors a year by National Parks monitoring) and topping this all off by seeking to use the mined area as a dump for toxic brine waste. These examples show obvious risks to the future viability of the Goulburn River, Munghorn Gap NR and ongoing safe access for members of the Public and First Nations peoples' to important cultural areas.

It is magical thinking to believe that this huge cost could be balanced by any promised benefit that may or may not accrue to the community if we allow extracting the last few million tonnes of coal from areas such as the Ulan/Wollar area to have priority over post mine rehabilitation. This unacceptable future risk is further compounded by Yancoal currently holding a license to further explore for coal directly to the north of the Drip (EL6288). The small chance of strategies for post mining rehabilitation yielding any practical benefit to future generations would significantly be more likely of success if expansions such as those above were curtailed while there still is time to do so.

This article "[\*Caring for carbon-intensive regions in transition: Using a feminist perspective to create a more just society\*](#)" Coal Transitions, April 2024. (Pdf) gives a well informed and different perspective. There are more people affected by the transition away from mining in a region than only the workers in the fossil fuel industry. Summarised below are recommendations for a more gender-just and caring transition:

- Make sure that women and other underrepresented groups participate equally and meaningfully in political decision-making, for example by scheduling meeting times so that they are compatible with care work and ensuring a respectful culture of communication.
- Support programmes and reskilling should not only be available for former fossil fuel workers but also for women and other groups that are indirectly affected, such as workers in secondary or informal industries.
- Female-dominated fields of activity should be strengthened in transition policy making. Those doing paid care work in areas such as education and health care must receive higher salaries, valorisation, and better working conditions – which the entire region, in return, will profit from.
- Unpaid care work taking place in families and communities must be made visible, supported and redistributed.
- There is a need to recognize the conflicts that have accompanied the extraction of fossil fuels. Dealing with the social conflicts as well as the ecological consequences of fossil fuel extraction requires perpetual aftercare.
- Social infrastructure must be supported, for example through long-term funding of staff positions that can provide the care work that is necessary for social cohesion.
- Creating spaces for exchange in which people of different social backgrounds and political views can meet, conflicts can be resolved, celebrations can take place, and new identity anchors for the region can be developed.

Yours sincerely

Colin Imrie.

