



Submission: Review of current coal mining in Greater Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas

From: Lane Cove Coal and Gas Watch

To: Independent Expert Panel for Mining in the Catchment

Date: 27 February 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Lane Cove Coal and Gas Watch (LCCGW), a sub-committee of the Lane Cove Bushland and Conservation Society, is a community group formed in 2014 to campaign for no-go zones for coal and coal seam gas activity in:

Drinking water catchment,
Prime agricultural land, and
Special wild places of New South Wales

LCCGW observes that the terms of reference specify only the special catchment area, which is only approximately 25% of the water catchment area. We also observe that the terms of reference only asks the panel to consider how mining can be mitigated in special catchment areas, but not whether there should be mining at all within the water catchment area of a metropolitan city, at a time where climate patterns are becoming more erratic, and where water security concerns may result in the costly operation of the Kurnell Desalination Plant.

LCCGW also notes the inadequacy of the government in assessing proposals for new mines and expansions in water catchment areas. The current inadequate assessment metric for coal mining projects, both new and expansions, have and would continue to result in disastrous environmental outcomes in other ways. Some additional concerns LCCGW have regarding the terms of reference, and Department of Planning's approach include:

- Economic merit prioritised over social and environmental merits. If relevant environmental outcomes of projects, such as filling in mine voids, avoiding undermining swamps, filtering discharge water prior to releasing into streams, make a project uneconomic, then mines should not be able to get approval based on economic merit. Precedence of proposals being approved without adequate environmental outcomes being met due to companies claiming these actions are cost prohibitive. Environmental outcomes should not be disregarded as a result to the economic effect it has on projects.
- Mine merits evaluated on short-term merits only, as opposed to long term impact. For example, the damage to upland swamps in the Blue Mountains region as a result of the Springvale Mine would expose the area to drought and bushfire risks for eternity, as well as decreasing the water security for the whole of the Sydney Basin. The very long-term risks (over 100 years) posed

by mining elsewhere in NSW has also included loss to prime agricultural land, which subsequently leads to reduced food security for our nation.

- Erosion of environmental offsets that should have been left in perpetuity. The Warkworth sands woodlands were to be held in perpetuity by Rio Tinto for the 2003 approval of the Warkworth mines, and yet the mine later gained approval to demolish this area for the Warkworth Extension Project.

LCCGW is of the opinion that any amount of mining in the water catchment area is inappropriate regardless of the requirements put in place for risk mitigation. LCCGW believes that, especially with higher population density, mining practices in water catchment areas should not be considered as the long-term hazard of damage to water supply and quality outweighs short term economic gains. The current Liberal government promised before the 2015 election that no mining would occur in water catchment areas in response to community-wide concerns of water loss and degradation as effects of mining. Community concerns proceeds to this day, and coal mining in water catchment areas.

LCCGW has conducted community door-knock surveys in the Lane Cove electorate multiple times in the past 5 years. Community survey showed that 93% of Northwood and 91% of Linley Point residents surveyed support the banning of coal and coal seam gas in Sydney's drinking water catchment, 97% of Lane Cove Central and 97% of Lane Cove West residents surveyed support a more balanced approach towards coal mining, which included putting a stop to Sydney's drinking water catchment area being undermined by longwall coal mining.

Coal mining is a high-risk activity. The destruction of upland swamps, the tailing spills into catchment area, and the draining of Thirlmere lakes, all shows that the long-term cost is not worth the gain. No amount of monitoring is going to repair cracked swamp bedrocks, fill dried lakes, or remove all traces of a spill.

LCCGW appreciate the expert panel's work, however we feel that the terms of reference limit the expert panel's ability to assess the larger picture, which is whether an invaluable resource, a water catchment and system which provides for a city of over 5 million people, is allowed to be irreversibly damaged for short term gain. We question whether any coal mining activity is appropriate at all in the whole of the water catchment area.

We are sure the panel appreciates the responsibility placed upon them. We would like the panel to reconsider the adequacy of the terms of reference and the risks to the water security of the people of New South Wales. We would like the panel to consider recommending the effective banning of mining in water catchment areas, for the sake of the people of New South Wales, and the people of Australia.

Sincerely,

Lane Cove Coal and Gas Watch.