

Submission to IEPMC (personal details redacted)

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission re the initial report from the Independent Expert Panel on Mining in the Catchment.

I am compelled to open with comments about the submission process for your report. This may not strictly adhere to your terms of reference, however for the sake of my democratic right to make a submission they must be said. Initially I was completely discouraged to make a submission because along with people I know and respect, the terms of reference appeared far too technical to address. The terms of reference that we are instructed to adhere to on the Dept of Planning website, can lead anyone who is a lay person to believe they aren't competent to comment. This I believe raises the strong possibility that there is any number of community members interested in responding who haven't because they have felt restricted to do so. This must surely create a lack of broad representative views from the public.

Equally I am critical of the chosen time for release of the report, just before Christmas last when most of us were so busy and preoccupied, a particularly bad time if the Panel is genuinely interested in seeking public comment.

My next concern is the focus of your investigation into mining in the catchment. This seems to be a lengthy assessment of the extent of damage already done and belies any sensible and timely practice of protection of the catchment because the mines continue to operate and add to the damage while you investigate as they will do during the time the government will take to decide what it might do with your recommendations. We/you already know from the 2008 Southern Coalfields Inquiry that the damage is alarming. You have outlined it again in your recent report. I have known about it for years from accounts and photographic evidence from local experts and I think we all know that there is no current technology that can fix it. Even more alarming there seems to be an ongoing natural escalation of damage already done which is extremely hard to contain let alone stop. The research of Dr Ian Wright of Western Sydney University, illustrates this as well as the even more difficult task of managing the problem in mines that have closed.

It is unbelievable that this is happening in the Special Areas of the Sydney drinking water catchment which supplies the largest number of people with water of any catchment in the country. A previous NSW government Chief Scientist has stated that there is nowhere else in the world that mining is allowed in a public drinking water catchment.

As an active member of the Illawarra Knitting Nannas Against Greed I am helping to carrying out community consultation on the impacts of mining in our water catchment. In the short few weeks since we became aware of your report the Illawarra Knitting Nannas have had many conversations with Wollongong people about the impacts of long wall coal mining in the Sydney Special Areas. The hard evidence of this short community consultation is the 350+ letters community members have signed to date. These letters are addressed to the NSW Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, generally therefore two letters per person. You should receive cc's of most of these letters, they are not submissions to your report so many will not arrive in time for the submission close date. We intend to continue this public consultation until action is taken to protect our drinking water.

The majority of people we have spoken to know of the low water levels of the dams, the uncertainty of rainfall in the current drought, the threat of escalating climate change and increased drought and they are amazed to learn that the desalination plant is not a backup for Wollongong's water supply even though we are told we will pay for it. Like me these people want to know that our water supply is secure now and in the future. But we realise that there is no insurance of secure water in this long process of data gathering, assessments and estimates while the mines continue their everyday business and ever increasing damage.

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I am obliged to ask why oh why are you not looking at mine pollution now? Is not mine pollution a risk you are to focus on as outlined in the first paragraph of the executive summary of your report? Quote *“The Independent Expert Panel for Mining in the Catchment was established in late February 2018 to provide informed expert advice to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment on the impact of mining activities in the Greater Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas, with a focus on risks to the quantity of water.”* I assume the last phase means potable drinking water.

Unplanned for and uncontrollable methane gas leaks are so common in coal and CSG mining, polluting the water and the land and air. Dr Ian Wright, who has the reputation of the expert on impacts of coal mining from his research and field work, says zinc and nickel and some other heavy metals are normal, expected pollutants, and are extremely toxic and often not accounted for on EPA mining licenses. It seems EPA's Environmental Protection Licences vary considerably in conditions applied to different collieries.

How is it that the mining companies have a free hand to irreparably damage the catchment that holds our most vital, precious but finite resource while a member of the public caught in the Special Areas will be threatened with a \$44,000 fine?

If the Panel finds that mining poses a risk to the catchment, which has been outlined in your report, then you have a clear responsibility to key stakeholders, that is the millions of people reliant on the Sydney Special Areas for their drinking water, PLUS a responsibility to our future generations, to call an immediate moratorium on mining and address the urgent need to find the means necessary to fix the current and accumulating damage. There is enough wriggle room to do this in TOR 1 f and TOR 2 b&c.

I and the people in the community I have been talking to want to know where is the precautionary principle in this process you are undertaking? They say NO damage is acceptable to the Sydney drinking water catchment. They say stop the coal mining now.

Will you please take this message back to the NSW state government.

Yours sincerely, Annie Marlow