

Submission to Planning Assessment Commission

Watermark Coal Project SSD4975

11 December 2014

Gunnedah markets itself as "The Koala Capital of the World". This reasonable description arises from the fact that the Gunnedah region is home to one of the two most significant koala populations in NSW.

The centre of the large koala population is not, however, Gunnedah itself, but an arc from Curlewis, through Breeza, Caroon, Spring Ridge and Tambar Springs. Over the past 18 months, I have helped a WIRES volunteer rescue over 30 sick and injured koalas, with the greatest concentration being from Curlewis to Breeza.

It is unfortunately the case that, over the last 10 years of drought, the koala population has declined markedly. The disease of Chlamydia is very common and is exacerbated by the drought conditions and extreme heat. Koalas with Chlamydia represent over half of those rescued. Thus the population of koalas in this region is already under threat.

It is incomprehensible that any government would contemplate putting a mine in the region around Breeza and Curlewis which requires the displacement of the population of koalas there. Whether the population of koalas there is 62 or 262, it is beyond question that the commencement of mining in the region would see it reduced almost to zero.

There is very little doubt that koalas translocated from this region will be effectively condemned to death. Male koalas are protective of their habitat and will not welcome significant numbers of rivals moved into their area. It is also obviously the case that whichever area koalas are moved into already has the number of koalas in it that can reasonably survive in the present conditions. Further, the area where Shenhua has so-called "offsets" is well removed from the Breeza region. Koalas adapt to the particular gum trees of their area. It is not necessarily the case that koalas moved from Breeza to the area between Tambar Springs and Coonabarabran will find food to their taste there.

For these various reasons, one would expect that very few of the translocated koalas would survive and pressure would also be put on the resident koala populations in the offset areas.

Thus a decision by PAC to approve the Shenhua mine is a death sentence to the koala population there and a significant threat to the koala population of the Gunnedah region.

Surely, at a time when the world as a whole is coming to the realization that the environment can not afford to maintain dependence for energy on fossil fuel which accelerates global warming, the large amount of money which the Chinese government would derive from this mine, and the small amount of money which the governments and people of Australia would get from it are not worth the extinction of a threatened species in the region.

Tony Moran, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]