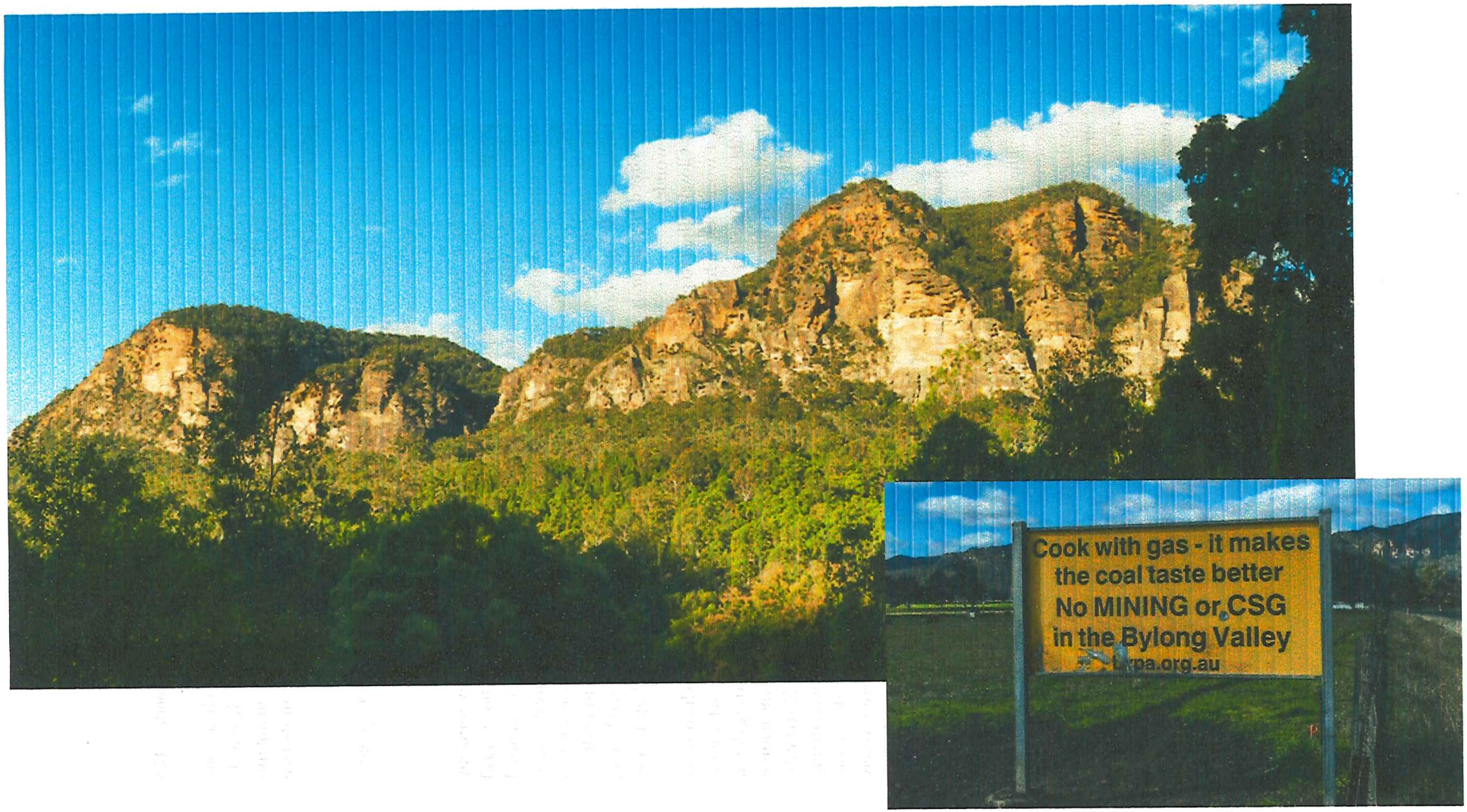
Submission to IPC Bylong Inquiry



Mudgee, Nov 7th by Dr Haydn Washington, PANGEA Research Institute, UNSW; Hon. Sec. The Colo Committee (active on coal issues in Western Coalfields since 1980

My involvement with the issue

- I live 24 km to the south of mine on Nullo Mountain.
- I am an environmental scientist with 38 years experience of assessing the environmental impact of coal mines.
- I am the Hon. Sec. of the Colo Committee that has worked extensively on the environmental impact of coal mines in the southern part of the Western coalfields since 1980. I spoke at PACs on Coalpac, Springvale, Airly and other proposals.
- I am a former member of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Advisory Committee.

Issues to consider

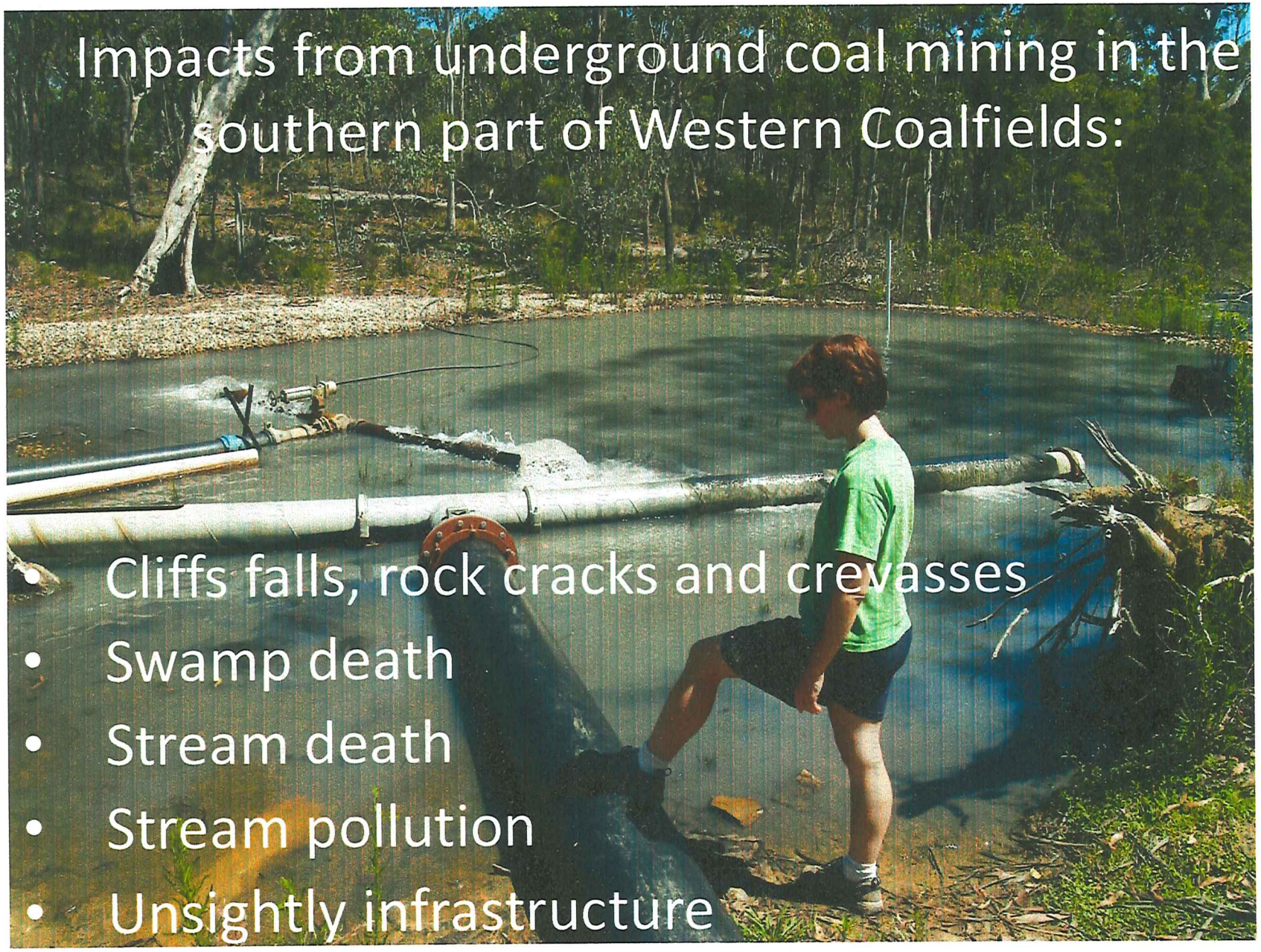
1. Poor track record of coal companies re supposed 'facts' in the Western Coalfields. **They get it *wrong*.**
2. Unacceptable impact of 3.3 m subsidence on cliffs from longwall mining.
3. The climate impact of this large coalmine when the IPCC has said society must ditch coal if we want to keep a liveable planet.
4. The impact of the mine in lowering groundwater in the adjoining Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.
5. Unacceptable visual pollution next to WHA.

1) Poor track record re coal mines - 'facts'

- Having been involved since 1980 I have heard many promises, statements and supposed facts that were *simply mistaken*.
- In Angus place mine it was stated that major cliff collapses were 'natural'. In fact they were caused by longwall mining. The Dept of Mineral Resources at The 1992 Airly Commission of Inquiry noted that over 2-3 years, Angus Place colliery *caused* **55 cliff collapses** and Baal Bone mine *caused* **124 collapses.**

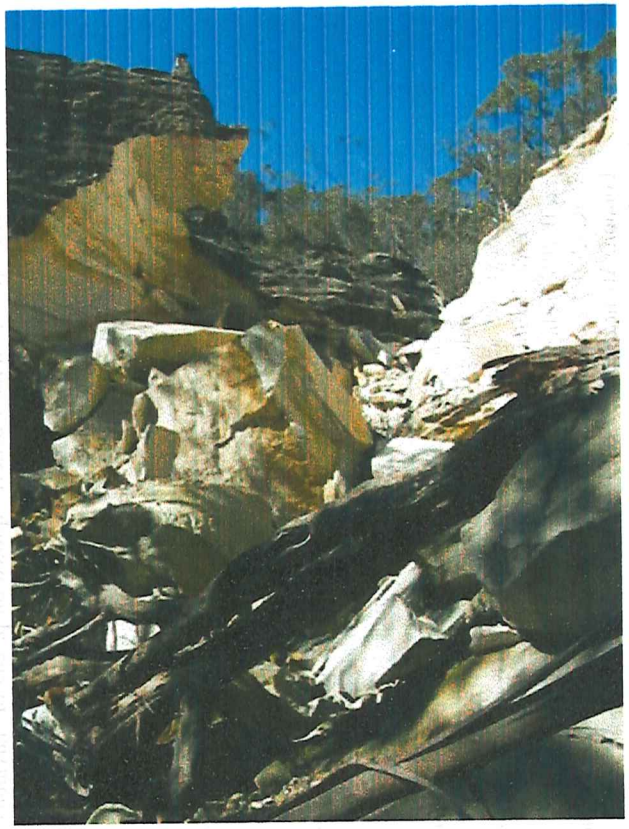
Poor track record re coal mine 'facts' - 2

- Baal Bone Colliery claimed longwall subsidence would not affect swamps in Long Swamp creek. **In fact these dried out.**
- Springvale colliery has claimed that longwall mining under important swamps on Newnes Plateau would not affect swamps. In fact they *are drying out*.
- Centennial Coal promised to mine only half the coal under Mount Airly, in fact now the are mining ***two thirds.***
- Claims that open cuts will be 'easily rehabilitated' have proven false.
- **Statements by coal companies *simply cannot be trusted.***


Impacts from underground coal mining in the southern part of Western Coalfields:
• Cliffs falls, rock cracks and crevasses
• Swamp death
• Stream death
• Stream pollution
• Unsightly infrastructure

Collapse of cliffs due to longwall mining

Major damage to



Cliff collapses – Baal Bone Colliery, 2009

Removal of the coal seam by intensive longwall methods can produce cliff collapses.

- At Baal Bone the surface was dropped up to 1.5 metres, at Bylong they plan to drop them by 3.3 metres!

- Cliff Protection Zones should prevent mining near cliffs.

Gaping crevasses

Baal Bone colliery

Swamp death

Long Swamp on Coxs River headwaters dead patch due to longwall mining subsidence from Baal Bone colliery

Swamp death upstream of crack

East Wolgan Swamp dying due to salinity – Springvale Colliery

Stream death

Monitoring reports always describe cracking as 'minor' and recovering by natural processes. In fact it's major.

109 Kay St - Google Maps

https://www.google.com/maps/place/109+Kay+St,+Carlton+VIC+3053/@-37.7872...

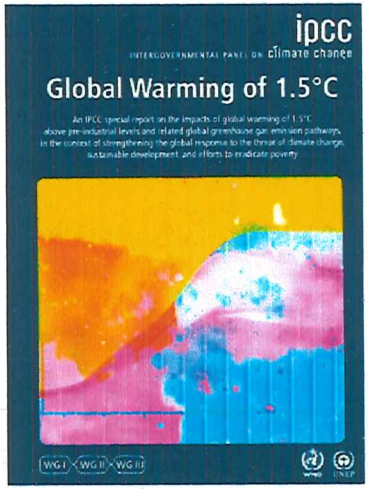
Stream pollution – Springvale Colliery

Hyper-saline water discharged below Junction Swamp (which is also dead)

2) Unacceptable impact of subsidence from proposed longwall mining at Bylong

- The Bylong PAC notes that 41 cliffs occur within the subsidence area, 30 of which will experience **3.3 metres subsidence**, with rock falls over 20% of cliffs and cracking over 50-70% of cliffs.
- Kepco describes this as 'minor'.
- In the southern part of the Western coalfields, such major cliff collapse has been ***deemed unacceptable for many years***.
- Why then is it considered acceptable in the Bylong valley, an ***area of great scenic grandeur***?

3) Impact on climate change



- While the IPC may consider climate change 'outside of its jurisdiction' this mine exacerbates a *huge problem we cannot ignore*.
- The IPCC report, released recently is an urgent reminder that **global warming poses a grave risk to humanity.**
- Australia and the rest of the world must virtually **eliminate the use of coal for electricity within 22 years** if there is to be a chance to save even some of the Great Barrier Reef.
- **Australia is at major risk** of more frequent, longer lasting and more intense heatwaves, harsher droughts, coastal flooding and longer, more dangerous bushfire seasons. The Murray may stop flowing, taking with it a lot of our food production areas. Some parts of Australia may become uninhabitable.

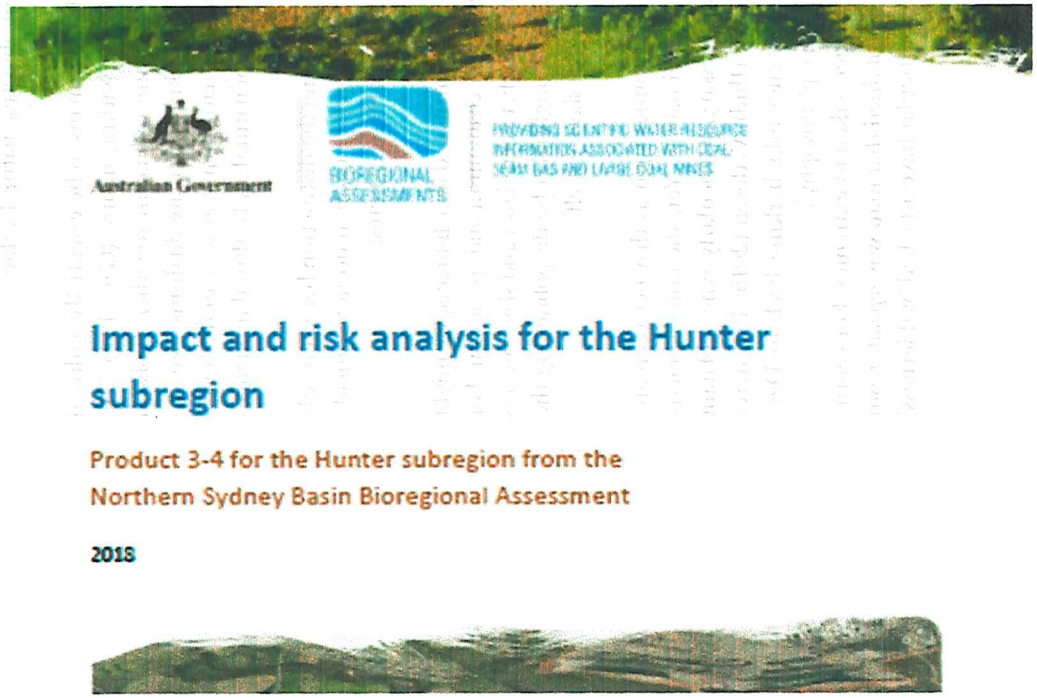
Climate - 2

- Renewable energy is now ***cheaper*** than coal-fired electricity for new-build sites (https://theconversation.com/factcheck-qanda-is-coal-still-cheaper-than-renewables-as-an-energy-source-81263)
- We *don't need* to mine another 6.5 million tonnes of coal for 25 years – and make the future of Australians (and our unique natural heritage) *even worse*. **We can move to 100% renewable energy by 2030** https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/article/downloads/ISF_100%25_Australian_Renewable_Energy_Report.pdf
- The impact of coal is the 'Elephant in the room' we can **no longer ignore or deny.**

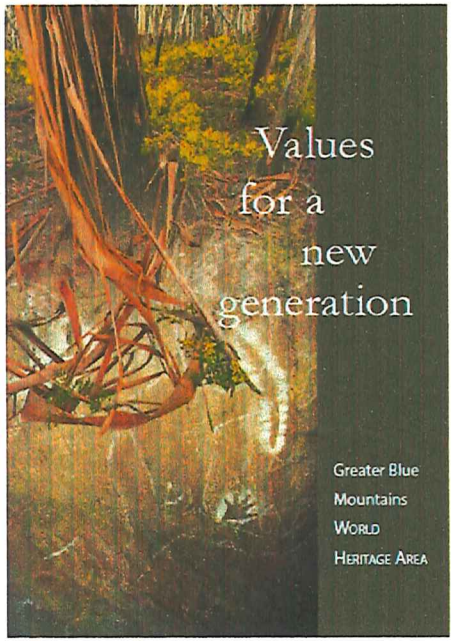
  It poses a risk to both society and a sustainable future.

4) Impact of the Bylong mine on groundwater in the WHA – The Hunter Sub-Region Bioregional Assessment

For the Hunter sub-region, the Bioregional Assessment found that '*There are 137 km^2 of the Greater Blue Mountains Area World Heritage Area within the zone of potential hydrological change in the Hunter subregion*" from new mining proposals, and the maps they provide show that the vast majority of this is in Wollemi National Park and is likely to occur as a result of the proposed Bylong coal mine

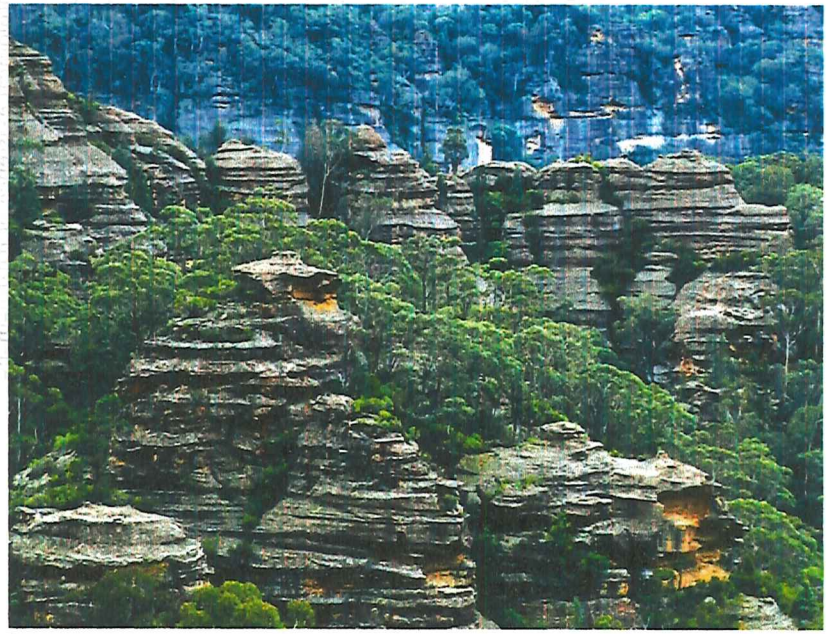


- The "zone of potential hydrological change" identified in the Bioregional Assessment combines *"the area with at least a 5% chance of exceeding 0.2 m drawdown due to additional coal resource development, and the area with at least a 5% chance of exceeding changes in specified surface water characteristics that arise due to additional coal resource development."*
- The Greater Blue Mountains WHA is a **superlative area of global significance.** Lowering groundwater in the WHA at a time of water stress due to climate change is not acceptable.
- NSW should not permit a project to damage one of its World Heritage Sites of **global significance** through lowering groundwater.



5) Destruction of scenic grandeur

- The Bylong Valley is an area of ***great scenic grandeur***. The adjacent Wollemi NP in the World Heritage Area has also been acknowledged as of *great scenic value*. The Bylong Labyrinth just upstream of the mine is an example of this.
- The proposed Bylong Project is actually visual pollution that damages that scenic grandeur. Hence it should not be permitted.



Pagodas, Bylong Labyrinth

Summary

- In 2013 the Coalpac PAC decided that for that area to the south, the proposed open cut, the ***negatives outweighed the positives***.
- The Bylong PAC concluded similarly that: 'doubts persist about the benefits and impacts of this projects'.
- After 38 years involved with coal mines as an environmental scientist, **I refute the proponents' claim that environmental impact will be minimal or acceptable.**
- **The Kepco Bylong Coal Project should be refused**.