

### **Objection to UCML MOD 4 proposed coal mine expansion.**

Thank you for the opportunity to have my say. **These are my own views and not those of the Rural Fire Service or of Cooks Gap RFB.**

UCML proposed expansion is being put forward for approval at a time when all available evidence clearly shows the world's climate is changing. A dangerous escalation of global temperature and climate is now plain to see. Such evidence cannot be dismissed as due to natural cycles; on the contrary it can only be explained as a result of human actions. This unfolding catastrophe is our creation, fuelled by a multitude of everyday decisions to ignore the risk and carry on with business as usual. Climate change enhanced disasters, such as recent killer heat waves in India and the alarming collapse of biodiversity recorded worldwide over recent decades, all are happening with just over a one degree global temperature rise. This is merely the beginning. Australian Capital Territory Government Minister Shane Rattenbury bluntly recognised the gravity of this crisis when he spoke at the recent Australia Energy Week conference in Melbourne:

***"Human-induced climate change is cooking the planet. We're at risk of ecological and societal collapse. This is not some green hyperbole; this is the analysis of the world's scientific community."***

It may be too obvious a point to make, but it seems to me that if we are to save ourselves and have any hope of salvaging something from this mess, an essential starting place is everyone agrees to stop making things worse. This undercuts the sole argument in justification of this proposal, which is the claim of public wealth created.

To quote Minister Rattenbury again:

***"The potential damages from climate change to Australia at current global emissions patterns are conservatively quantified at \$584 Billion in 2030 and \$762 Billion in 2050."***

The key take home message of relevance to this independent panel is that the cost of any further expansions to mining coal may prove more than the value of the resource.

Mod 4 furthers the footprint of adverse mining impacts over time and scale to the north and the west. From that viewpoint, this proposed expansion cannot be evaluated as a minor change. I see it as the latest in a long history of incremental mining expansions that have damaged the viability and resilience of the Goulburn River and the way of life of landowners in the Ulan/Turill/Wollar area. The mining expansions in this area have demonstrated inadequate or nil consideration of the whole of the impacts and a Government regulator shamefully disengaged from critical evaluation. Compared to the claims of jobs and wealth, the people who have put their all into establishing homes and businesses here are just collateral damage, someone else's problem. Any holding of multinational mining companies to account or the identification, protection and valuing of irreplaceable local assets such as the Drip and Corner Gorges or Curryall and Mona Creeks has been left exclusively to members of the public working unpaid in their own time (I have listed some of the most egregious historical examples on the back page of my written submission).

The outcomes of mining in this area clearly show approvals have been based on flawed concepts and modelling. For me the most annoying examples are firstly the persistent reliance on theoretical underground barriers that supposedly prevent connectivity and isolate from degradation overlying

ground and surface water. Secondly are the oft repeated claims of 'perched aquifers' somehow immune from the nearby wholesale collapse of strata and dewatering at a landscape scale and over decades. These unverifiable claims now have a post-truth life of their own which allows understaffed and, by their actions, uninterested State, Federal and Local Government agencies to sign off uncritically anything put in front of them.

Since before I did my basic training in 1989, I have been an active volunteer firefighter, presently I am Deputy Captain and Brigade Training Officer for this area's one remaining bush fire brigade. As part of the reading for this presentation I was horrified to see that a 10 metre drawdown has already been approved in Mod 3 over most of the catchment for Curryall Creek (Appendix C RtS for GW AGE figure 3-6). Sadly we were preoccupied at the time and missed the danger for this precious perennial local stream. I am sorry; I believe the drying up of this reliable water source will make fighting fires in the Ulan/Turill area that much harder and less safe. The bridge on the Ulan Road crossing Curryall Creek is the only publicly accessible water drafting site between the Drip Picnic area and the Murrumbline Creek at Turill. Dealing with lightning strikes or roadside fires as first responders and for training purposes is where water drafting sites like Curryall Creek are most appreciated. At a major fire tankers can refill with bulk water carriers and use aircraft support. However even at a big fire, standing water sources able to be used for water drafting even in dry times, are an increasingly rare option that could turn out to be lifesaving. The loss of this irreplaceable public asset will be made yet more certain by this current modification and as a firefighter and local landowner I strongly protest.

It is not as if the existence of this water site is any secret. The nearby "Green Hills" is the site of a C19th inn, while across the highway are the remains of an old steam powered flour mill and as well on cadastral maps are shown a cluster of small acreage old blocks. These are clear indicators of a reliable water source, well-known since the 1800s, but now considered of no value compared to maximising exploitation of the coal resource.

I also have to mention Mona Creek (RtS page 7 point 3.3). This ephemeral watercourse or series of moist vegetated gullies is one more natural asset set to be degraded by this mining process. I have been on previously longwall mined land nearby at hazard reductions and vividly remember falling into surface cracks that were common across the longwall mined ridges and gullies. Calling Mona Creek alluvial system 'perched' or 'hydraulically disconnected' is a highly qualified theoretical distinction. Collapsing the underlying strata and systematically dewatering the area must change everything as far as the vegetation and wildlife are concerned, not to mention any Aboriginal heritage sites. These gullies may no longer be moist in dry times and the ancient song of the lyrebird no longer echo there.

Throughout the many years we have lived on the Goulburn River, for our way of life and the business on which we depend, a viable river and groundwater system has been crucial. Without water the land is effectively sterilized. Undertakings by mining companies to truck water in cannot alter this basic fact: without sustainably managed water resources, no one can live on their land permanently and there is no hope to meet the challenges of a changing climate. Recently my daughter had the idea to move back home and try to set up a business. We had a lovely conversation about her dreams for the future. Everyone wants to hand on something of our life's work to our daughters and

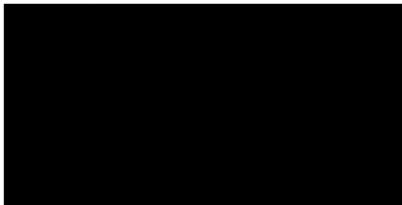
sons. Unfortunately for us this dream is not going to come true while there is uncertainty, conflict and environmental degradation from the ever expanding coal mines upstream.

Repeated solemn commitments have been made by our leaders, internationally, nationally and at state level: promising real action and commitment to deliver sustainable management of water resources, protection of our rivers and groundwater. Whether these were genuine undertakings, made with real intent to actively prevent degradation of our rivers and aquifers, or just empty words, can be judged by how they are applied.

I request that this independent panel consider and honour commitments made by NSW and Australian Government to sustainable water management, to protect and restore rivers and aquifers.

Yours sincerely

Colin Imrie BA.



Short list of examples of uncritical Government sign offs showing the onus is on unpaid members of the public to identify and protect irreplaceable local assets. These are all on the public record and represent hundreds of hours of unpaid work.

- Goulburn River diversion approved in 1982, later requiring expensive remedial works and an ongoing environmental hazard to this day.
- Approval (2009) of Moolarben CM (UG4) to mine up to 500 m from the Drip despite expert testimony giving a minimum of one kilometre and also based on later disproven groundwater information.
- Transfer of freehold title to MCM of the lease land surrounding the Drip and Corner Gorges despite assurances high conservation value land would be exempt.
- UCML in the 1990s releasing high salt water (^2000ec) into the river and MCM releasing turbid water late 2009. Both went on until public complaints forced action.
- Residents of the Cumbo Valley suffered years of mine noise, all apparently within the guidelines, until public outcry forced buy outs and remedial action.