

Report Opposing Centennial Coal's Applications to Release Water into the Greater Blue Mountains UNESCO National Park

1. Introduction The purpose of this report is to outline the reasons for opposing Centennial Coal's applications to release water into the Greater Blue Mountains UNESCO National Park. The proposed discharges pose significant environmental, ecological, and public health risks, which contradict both national and international conservation commitments.

2. Environmental and Ecological Concerns

2.1 Water Contamination

The release of water from coal mining operations is likely to contain heavy metals, saline effluents, and other pollutants that can degrade water quality. Studies have shown that mine-affected water can contain elevated levels of arsenic, lead, and selenium, which are toxic to aquatic life and can accumulate in the food chain.

2.2 Impact on Aquatic Ecosystems

The Greater Blue Mountains region supports a range of unique aquatic ecosystems, including critical freshwater habitats for endangered species such as the Macquarie perch and the Blue Mountains water skink. The introduction of contaminants can alter pH levels, reduce oxygen availability, and introduce harmful algae blooms, endangering native species.

2.3 Hydrological Disruptions

The region's natural watercourses, including creeks and rivers that sustain both flora and fauna, rely on balanced water flow and quality. The release of mine-affected water could alter flow patterns, leading to erosion, sedimentation, and long-term ecosystem imbalance.

3. Legal and Policy Violations

3.1 Breach of UNESCO Commitments

The Greater Blue Mountains was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its outstanding universal value. Approving Centennial Coal's proposal would contradict Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention, which mandates the protection and conservation of listed sites.

3.2 Contravention of State and Federal Environmental Laws

The release of mine wastewater could violate the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999, the NSW Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997, and water quality guidelines set by the National Water Quality Management Strategy.

4. Community and Public Health Impacts

4.1 Drinking Water Contamination

The Greater Blue Mountains region contributes to Sydney's water catchment, supplying drinking water to millions of people. Pollution from mine water releases increases the risk of contamination, which could necessitate costly treatment measures or result in health hazards.

4.2 Cultural and Recreational Value

The park is an important cultural and recreational site for Indigenous communities, tourists, and local residents. Water pollution could damage culturally significant sites, deter tourism, and reduce the park's aesthetic and recreational appeal.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the outlined environmental, legal, and public health risks, Centennial Coal's applications to release water into the Greater Blue Mountains UNESCO National Park should be rejected.

Recommendations:

- Centennial Coal should be required to implement onsite water treatment solutions to meet the highest environmental standards before any discharge is considered.
- Independent scientific assessments should be conducted to evaluate long-term impacts on biodiversity and water quality.
- The NSW Government should reinforce its commitment to protecting World Heritage-listed sites by strengthening regulatory frameworks that prohibit mining wastewater discharge into sensitive ecosystems.

Protecting the integrity of the Greater Blue Mountains National Park is a national and global responsibility. Rejecting Centennial Coal's application aligns with Australia's environmental commitments and ensures the preservation of this unique and irreplaceable landscape for future generations.