



## Ryde - Hunter's Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society

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Member of Nature Conservation Council of N.S.W.

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Independent Expert Panel  
Chief Scientist and Engineer  
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22 February 2019

### **Re: Review of current coal mining in Greater Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas**

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are a local conservation group established in 1966 with the objective to promote ecologically sustainable land use and development at the local, state, and national levels. Our members advocate measures to safeguard the environment from all forms of pollution to ensure, clean air, clean water and a healthy environment and address climate change.

Whilst we note your panel's focus on the catchment's Special Areas it is our concern that overall Sydney's drinking water catchment has been neglected by government for many years. This water supports a fast growing Sydney whose residents need, and deserve, access to adequate good quality drinking water. The recent switch on of the Sydney's desalination plant has added to the cost of water supplied to these residents.

We would argue that the declining dam levels that necessitated this switch on cannot be dismissed as merely due to the current drought. Government must take account of the impacts of the numerous mines within the drinking water catchment area as well as the four mines within the Special Areas. These currently occurring impacts will be exacerbated over time by the broader effects of a changing climate.

The amount of water lost from Warragamba and Nepean dams due to this mining activity appears poorly understood by government. This lack of understanding is of both surface and ground water systems. Government's "toleration" of pollution of the drinking water supply is also disturbing.

We consider it unacceptable and irresponsible for government to respond in an ad hoc approach to individual ecological catastrophes such as collapsed riverlets, exploding swamps and rock fractures and ignore the cumulative impacts of incremental mining activity across the whole catchment on Sydney's drinking water quantity and quality.

The recent catchment audit was unable to quantify the water lost to underground mines. This clearly indicates the critical need for a cumulative impact assessment of mining within the drinking water catchment.

Government needs to take full account of the adverse damage current mining activity is having in special areas that are natural areas sensibly set aside to protect Sydney drinking water. No further mining should be occurring in these areas and any exploration licences cancelled.

Outside the Special Areas a moratorium should be applied on mining until an independent and rigorous assessment of the cumulative impacts occurs and a regulatory regime developed to control pollution and further hydrological damage.

The protection of precious biodiversity within the catchment is also our concern. Species and endangered ecological communities that are listed under State and Commonwealth threatened species legislation, some even on the IUCN Red List will be destroyed by mining activity. Healthy ecosystems make an important contribution to water quality and must be properly protected. Current NSW biodiversity offset programs must be recognized as absolutely inadequate in protecting this irreplaceable biodiversity in such an important location.

The protection of Sydney's drinking water catchment must be a government priority. In the absence of an accurate understanding of how much water is being, and could be lost in the future, necessitates the implementation of the precautionary principle in government decision making across the whole catchment.

The current approach is not ecologically sustainable, not in the public interest and ludicrous given the inevitability of the consequences of global warming on water supply. Sydney siders cannot afford multiple desalination units especially when improved management of the catchment could ensure adequate good quality water for a growing Sydney long into the future.

Yours sincerely,

Cathy Merchant  
Committee Member