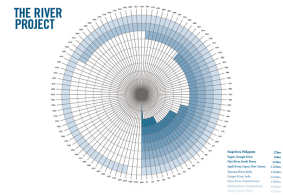


Recommendations from;
Upper Georges River Sustainability Symposium

A major initiative of the River Project
Campbelltown Arts Centre
16th October 2010.



Introduction

This highly successful event brought together environmental groups, members of the arts community, academics, residents, students and most importantly, a range of decision makers at every level. They were drawn from a broad geographical area, to discuss their shared concern for the valued natural areas of the upper Georges River catchment and to identify actions needed to achieve their protection and sustainable management.

The keynote speaker was Dr Ian Wright. He reported the findings of his study into upper Georges River water quality, and evaluated the relative contribution of urban, rural and extractive industries to its pollution loads. He found that mine discharges into the Georges River were the most significant contribution in terms of point source pollution. He further argued that the NSW environmental licensing system had failed to identify and regulate adequately mine discharges of both salts and heavy metals.

Attendees expressed concerns particularly about mining impacts on the swamps and streams that comprise the headwaters of the Georges River. In response, Dr Ann Young outlined both the considerable degree and nature of likely mining impacts on the ecological and hydrological integrity of the upper Georges River catchment.

Either on the speaker panel or in the audience were the following dignitaries;

- Catherine Cusack, Shadow Minister for Climate Change and the Environment;
- Cr Lesa de Leau, Australian Greens State candidate and Councillor, Rockdale Council;
- Cr Philip Sansom, Chair of the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority and Mayor, Hurstville Council;
- Cr Michael Banasik, Mayor of Wollondilly, and Brad Stagg, a senior council officer;
- Cr. Jai Rowell, Campbelltown Council;
- Cr Anne Wagstaff, Hurstville Council;
- Cr Mark Coure, Kogarah Council; and
- The Hon. Alison Megarritty, State MP for Menai.

This symposium was one of the community engagement strategies of the Rivers Project, part of the Upper Georges River Sustainability Program, initiated by Georges River Combined Councils Committee. It was held in conjunction with the Art Exhibition, hosted and supported by the Campbelltown Arts Centre.

The outcomes of the meeting, included the recommendations, reached by consensus, listed below. It was agreed that they should be communicated to the state government and opposition, key agencies and councils. Subsequent responses they require and any commitments to follow-up actions would then be broadly publicized.

Sharyn Cullis

Symposium Co-ordinator

20/11/10.

Recommendations

- **Any mining approvals in this catchment should be limited to a 10 year future time horizon, and have applied setbacks of one kilometre for both feeder swamps as well as all tributary streams of the Georges River to protect them from cracking and draining impacts. This reiterates and supports the position of Rivers SOS in regard to all major river systems in NSW.** This position was prompted by the unreasonable Bulli Seam Operation D/A which admitted risk to 47 streams and 55 swamps for 30 years into the future, with 136 longwalls across environmentally sensitive areas including the drinking water catchments of Woronora and Cataract and the Dharawal State Conservation Area. It is recognized that this may be the precursor of other similarly disturbing proposals.
- **Any panels convened as part of the Planning Assessment Commission for Part 3A approvals should contain experts free of professional association with the mining industry.** It is not considered appropriate that experts who work as consultants to the mining industry be part of the Assessment processes, as they can be regarded as having a conflict of interests.
- **The collation and immediate release of data held, by BHP and government departments, on levels of toxins and heavy metals contained in waste water from Brennans Ck dam as a result of the Westcliff coalmine, that then discharges into the Georges River just upstream of Appin.** This is against the background that recent independent testing of Dr Ian Wright that did show that salinity levels downstream of the dam discharge point were 10 times the safe standard. The lack of funding meant that he could not afford to monitor heavy metals. This data clearly needs to be out in the public domain, before any decision to grant approval to BHP to extend its mining operations, and the volume of its waste discharge massively. If the regulator is not successfully controlling the current situation, there is no justification for the compounding of the problem with a new approval.
- **The implementation of an adequate real time and ongoing testing program, that recognizes all possible pollutant sources and types, monitors, releases data that is reliable, transparent and accessible to the public.** It is suggested that both the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority and the Goerges River combined Councils Committee should have a role in this.
- **The upgrading of the Dharawal Reserve to a Nature Reserve or National Park, in order to protect it permanently from the damaging impacts of mining, keep it as a future recreational resource and refuge for the 17 threatened species identified in the mining project area.** Dr Ian Wright described O'Hares Ck, in Dharawal, as of a size and pristine nature that he has not seen anywhere else in the Sydney region. BHP's 30 year plan of BHP will severely impact upon the hidden swamps and streams that feed this iconic treasure and are found in the most hidden parts of Dharawal.

Additional and Explanatory notes

- Estimated numbers in attendance 50-60 with 22 signing up to be part of the review group to make contributions to this final document.
- The overwhelming area of concern was framed by the immediate threat of the Bulli Seam Operation, at the time before the Planning Minister for approval. Recommendations remain relevant to any existing or new approvals sought for longwall mining, and it is anticipated that community concern would no doubt be extrapolated should any major Coal seam gas proposal develop for the same area.
- **Panel comments;** Catherine Cusack said that mining companies should have to internalize the real costs of their operation. Philip Sansom spoke of his personal observations in the past of disastrous riverbed cracking along the Georges at Jutts Crossing and Mahnyes Hole. Lesa de Leau said the Greens have a policy of no coal new mines in NSW recognition of the unacceptable impacts of coal mining.
- **Environmental Groups** brought together for the day; Executive members from the Georges River Environmental Alliance, Georges River Environmental Action Team, Rivers SOS, National Parks Association Macarthur, Total Environment Centre, Botany Bay and Rivers Catchment Alliance, the Australian Water Alliance and Friends of Oatley.
- **Academics present;** Dr Greg Teale UWS, Dr Ian Wright UWS and Dr Anne Young ex UWO.
- Support from the staff of the Campbelltown Arts Centre, especially that of the Curator, Lisa Havilah, was vital and appreciated, The UGR SG reference group was represented on the day by Pat Durman, DR Greg Teale and Signe Westerwood. Excellent facilitation was provided by Les Robinson from Enabling Change.

Concluding comments; The variety of stakeholder interests represented was very impressive. It was particularly significant that people from downstream communities of the Georges River (GR) catchment had come to share their opposition to longwall mining, with locals. This local matter is increasingly recognized as of regional and state significance.

The GR catchment is one of the most densely populated in Australia, with more than a million people depending on the river as its scenic and recreational centerpiece. Views expressed on the day were consistent with the major principle that its major headwaters in the Dharawal, must remain pristine in order to keep the whole river robust into the future.

Over the long history of coal mining in the Macarthur and Illawarra, collateral environmental damage has either been ignored or tolerated. In the past governments and their regulators have not set standards high enough to protect the environment, and now the evidence of this is apparent in this region. Newer emerging technologies in underground mining are associated with an increasing capacity to do damage. There is a growing community expectation that mining should only proceed on the application of the principle of “**Nil surface damage**” in future.