

Rivers of Shame II

A Review of the second RiversSOS documentary by Pauline Roberts, CCAG

It's more than a national shame that we have to have yet another film showing the devastation caused by coal mining to our above and below-ground water supplies. If any other industry caused this kind of sustained, irreparable damage to a national asset, those responsible would be in jail. In many countries, the government ministers that allowed such devastation would be politely asked to join them.

In this clear, rational, informative series of talking heads and environmental damage footage, the foreseen and forewarned damage to rivers, waterways and aquifers is clearly shown for all to see. Even Blind Freddy couldn't miss it, or the most myopic of ministers. The views expressed come from scientists, ex-miners, ex-government officials, farmers, townsfolk and members of the coal-mine affected communities, those that truly bear the costs. The potential impact to our Liverpool Plains is outlined by George Clift, Struan Willis and Doug Rankin of CCAG including the often forgotten threats to our Nation's food supplies. The sadness for an environment now lost shows clearly on the faces of those speaking about the rapacious mining in the world heritage Barrington Tops area.

The film makes abundantly clear that mining is sanctioned *regardless of:*

- community submissions into the process
- official submissions by other government departments – eg. Sydney catchment authority, environmental protection authority, health department and independent consultants/scientific reports
- specialist advice and scientific data (excepting that paid for by mining companies)
- the effects down-stream on communities/industries/water users (eg. farming, fishing, irrigation, drinking water catchments, Murray Darling Basin etc) or any legacy results on the environment
- 'normal' legal and democratic processes.

It is obvious that mining, once granted, continues to be allowed *regardless of:*

- blatant breaches of any specifically-applied environmental requirements (usually not onerous in the first place)
- community complaints and monitoring of
 - pollution; noise; low frequency disturbance; dust; water contamination; drying up of house, stock and irrigation bores; cracking of river beds; subsidence of land; social effects

and that there is no government department which will ultimately be held accountable for these breaches. In addition, any environmental monitoring/oversight has been removed from the Health

Rivers of Shame II

A Review of the second RiversSOS documentary by Pauline Roberts, CCAG

Department's remit (eg. water quality changes affecting human health); environmental department monitoring is woefully understaffed and likely to be cut further and relies almost totally on community submissions (who have to pay for their own experts to even get a 'hearing' and are then dismissed anyway) and that ultimately, the department of mining within DPI has the final say.

Once sanctioned, the mines have essentially open slather to:

- change the consent and conditions to better suit their needs, even *before* mining takes place, and this includes increasing the amount of coal recovered and mining closer to, or under, previously specifically excluded areas
- remove significant amounts of clean water every day (eg. 11 ML per day at Ulan = 5 Olympic-sized swimming pools) at low or no cost, including during times of drought, and whilst farmers are having their allocations removed, downscaled or 'bought back'. Then render the water toxic.
- cause almost any detrimental effect downstream/outside of the lease or in the surrounding area without having to pay compensation and usually without any government oversight or action being taken.

The film makes clear however:

- the need for benchmarking of properties, rivers, streams, habitats, species, human/animal/plant health, towns, water sources, our fertile plains, anything that is at risk so that the polluter can be made to pay as the costs become evident. Long-walling has a clear and rapid impact in many areas and only taking these companies to court, with prior data, offers any hope of compensation for the damage caused.
- that royalty dollars (\$800 million rising to \$1.2 billion) paid to NSW government overrule any and all damage to the environment, communities, livelihoods, health, water supplies caused by mining and if mining growth is to cease, federal funding will need to make up the shortfall (to paraphrase Sartor) and people power is needed to vote out any layer of government supporting such obvious environmental terrorism.
- job and economic benefits are a fallacy, workers are 'fly in, fly out' so have little contact with the community; automation is on the increase, health effects of mining cause greater impact on stretched resources and the lasting, detrimental socio-environmental effects on the communities that we cherish, by coal mining are profound.

It is sad that we have to fight our own government to get it to do the right thing by its people, its water and food supplies and the environment. You can't eat coal and you can't drink coal-poisoned water. Make your democratic voice count, write, phone, email your MP today and say ENOUGH!