

[An open letter from a member of a mine-affected community in response to Christine Robertson, MP's interjection in NSW State Parliament. (28th May 2008)]

The Hon. Christine Robertson,
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000

As a Country Labor supporter we were very disappointed with your comments during the recent debate on the **MINING AMENDMENT BILL 2008** (May 7). Your interjection to Ms Lee Rhiannon with claims of *hysterical imagination* is both unfortunate and inappropriate and indicates that you are either unaware or poorly informed about the impact of coal mining on both the environment and rural communities.

We have been living and running a business on the Goulburn River (upper Hunter Valley) downstream from the Ulan Coal Mine for the past 25 years. Over that time we have taken an active role in observing and monitoring water quality (both professionally and personally). We have conversed and negotiated with the mine in order to minimise their impacts with some limited success. Problems with the discharge of saline water, loss of base flow to the river due to the interference and breaching of the groundwater and increasing sediment pollution from the river diversion are some of the very real problems we have witnessed. This single mine placed quite significant stress on both the health and viability of the river and it was only through our persistent pressure, monitoring and letters to the EPA and other government departments were we able to expose the problems and achieve some improvements in the mines behaviour.

Unfortunately we are now entering an unprecedented expansion in the coal industry. Ulan Coal mine was producing around 4-6 Million tonnes/annum of coal five years ago – this is set to increase to over 40 million tonnes/annum in the next 5 years with the opening of two more open cut and underground coal mines and further expansion of the Ulan Mine. This will in reality create a super mine across the head of the Goulburn River which will further breach the groundwater system and involve the clearing of many 100s hectares of native vegetation, including critically endangered ecological communities that cannot be replaced. Already families along the Wollar and Ulan roads are experiencing unacceptable levels of noise and dust from the huge new Wilpinjong open cut mine and many have chosen to leave the area.

We have followed due process written submissions, attended hearings and CCC meetings, met with Mr Sartor as affected landholders, and made every attempt to expose how this unprecedented expansion is having a profound and long term effect on this area – both socially and environmentally. We have raised our concerns supported by science and our independent consultants. However it appears we are being abandoned and our concerns offhandedly dismissed by the Labor party.

The interference to the groundwater and river system is just one example. Ulan CM currently intercepts around 15 million litres of water per day. Current predictions indicate that water extractions will rise to a **minimum of 30 million litres** per day when all three mines are in production – this constitutes a significant long term impact on this valuable resource. An independent expert assessment panel set up by the Department of Planning raised many concerns that still remain unanswered. The new Moolarben Coal Mine was approved with monitoring – yet the results will only come in after the damage has been done, this river system is clearly being

sacrificed for the coal industry. We refer you to the following websites for more information www.savethedrip.com and www.riverssos.com

Over 3 years ago we provided a Submission on the Amendments to the Mining Act asking for more stringent protection of our water resources and protection of native vegetation and the rights of the surrounding community. Ms Rhiannon was being entirely accurate in her speech that the mining amendments '*do not address the ongoing environmental destruction mining causes to rivers, farmlands and regional communities and, in particular, the longer-term need to curb expansion of the coal industry as a response to climate change*'. She has been the only parliamentarian that actually visited and listened to local landholders whose lives have been turned upside down by coal mining.

Data from the Federal Government's National Pollutant Inventory shows that the Hunter has some of the country's biggest emitters of potentially toxic substances, with asthma and cancer levels to match. Coalmine and related operations were responsible for more than 50,000 tonnes or 86% of fine dust emitted into the Hunter's air in 2006/07 – these are figures you cannot ignore.

We ask you to give support to a series of independent assessments and studies into the cumulative and long term impacts of coal mining including:

- Investigation into the interference to groundwater and rivers and impact on the health and viability of these systems
- Audit of rehabilitated areas to identify how successful or otherwise current practises are in restoring ecologically resilient natural systems
- A study into the effects of dust and noise on public health and suitability of the regulatory conditions governing mines

As a Country Labor representative we invite you to come and talk to the community, see some of the mining impacts for yourself and discuss our real concerns about the future.