



Ms Kristina Robinson
Energy Resource Assessment
NSW Department of Planning and Environment

Via email: krinstina.robinson@dpie.nsw.gov.au

Thursday 12 October, 2023

Dear Ms Robinson,

Objection to modification to Springvale Water Treatment Project (SSD-7592)

Springvale Coal has requested modification of the Springvale Water Treatment Project consent (SSD-7592) through proposed modification 9.

Wilderness Australia objects to this modification of the consent. Wilderness Australia (formerly the Colong Foundation for Wilderness) believes the extension of time sought for the interim water management strategy under this modification is inappropriate as the arrangement is for most of the remaining life of the Springvale mine. In other words, the request is not an interim arrangement but, given previous extensions, a permanent arrangement where mine water may by-pass the reverse osmosis water treatment plant.

Wilderness Australia is a community conservation organisation that campaigns for the protection and management of wilderness, national parks and other large natural areas. The organisation was founded in 1968 (as the Colong Committee) and has played a major role in many important conservation achievements over the past 55 years in NSW. Many of these achievements are highly valued by the community. Yet they were only achieved by sustained and vigorous public action supported by forward-looking governments and government agencies.

Public Exhibition challenges

The short window for public comment on this modification is one of three related Centennial Coal modification proposals. These modifications opened for comment at the beginning of the October long weekend. This timing effectively denies the public the 14-day minimum time permitted under planning law for review and comment on modification proposals.

It is difficult to make a considered submission in such a short time frame, especially when there are two other modifications on which to make a submission that also need to be understood as each interacts with the others.

The modification would cause or permit a breach of the Springvale Mine development consent and should be part of the water management for Angus Place West proposal

Through this modification request to extend an interim water management arrangement, the applicant, Springvale mine (Centennial Coal), is getting around the purposes of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979* to avoid adequate assessment and review of potential environmental impacts associated with a significant change to water management at the Springvale mine.

Springvale Mine Extension Project (SSD-5594) (SMEP) has a consent that requires no discharge of mine water to the Cocks River catchment. This may firstly be worked around by the transfer of mine water to Angus Place if the proposed discharge at Western Coal Services LDP001 is approved (modification 5). This gets around the SMEP consent by the “laundering” of mine water via Angus Place mine. The Springvale mine consent requires a discharge limit of 0 ML/day of mine water through LDP009 into the Springvale Delta Water Transfer Scheme by 1 July 2019. Additionally, SMEP is required to discharge all groundwater inflow mine water (except from the Renoun workings) through the Springvale Delta Water Transfer Scheme (SMEP consolidated consent, clause 12, mine water discharges).

If SMEP mine water from Springvale mine is discharged at LDP001 Western Coal Services via Angus Place mine, then this discharge is a breach of the SMEP development consent as all groundwater inflow must be through the Springvale Delta Water Transfer Scheme (i.e. the \$200 million dollar water treatment plant). The pathway of the mine water is irrelevant, it remains Springvale mine water and its discharge at LDP001 would be a breach of the consent.

Further, the introduction of modification report (mod 9 report) states “This extension is required to manage the threat of flooding the underground infrastructure associated with the Angus Place Colliery and the Springvale Coal Mine.” The connection of this interim water management operation to Centennial’s expansion plans at Angus Place West is implied by this statement, but how modification 9 will operate to reduce the threat of flooding is unclear. It appears that this proposed Modification 9 for Springvale Water Treatment Plant, as well as Modification 8 for Angus Place and modification 5 for Western Coal Services, are all part of the proposed activities necessary for Centennial’s major project to expand mining in the Angus Place West area – which is going through a state significant development application process.

Contamination of Sydney’s drinking water supplies

It appears that the extension of the interim water management strategy (IWMS) may be part of a means by which Springvale Coal avoids or minimises its use of the \$200 million Springvale Water Treatment Plant (SSD 7592), in addition to its plan to discharge mine water at LDP001 Western Coal Services by Angus Place mine.

Springvale mine claims that “The provision to transfer partially treated water to the (TCR) in accordance with the IWMS is the most feasible and reasonable option available to currently to manage mine inflows at Springvale and Angus Place during period [sic] of high water make” (modification report, page 5).

Springvale mine water is only filtered before it is sent to the TCR, bypassing the reverse osmosis plant. From TCR it may be discharged to Lake Lyell. Regardless of the claimed urgency, the effect of this proposed modification 9 is to continue to avoid the intended obligation in the consent for Springvale mine (SMEP, SSD-5594) that requires mine water to be treated at the \$200 million reverse osmosis water treatment plant (i.e. the Springvale Mine Water Transfer Scheme that prohibits discharges to LDP009, which is now called WCS LDP001).

Centennial Coal is also apparently attempting to hold the NSW Government captive to approve this modification by alleging that proposed modification 9 is “essential to ensure the coal supply of coal to the

MPPS is not compromised. The ongoing supply of coal to MMPS is critical for energy security in NSW, during the State's energy transition to renewables."

The modification report then alleges that "Previous modifications seeking extensions to the IWMS had demonstrated these incremental transfers to the TCR have not resulted in significant impacts to the water quality and that the storage capacity of the TCR have not been exceeded during the transfers" (modification report, page 6).

This former claim appears to be incorrect and misleading because TCR originally had a salinity of 200 μ S/cm in the year 1990 rising to 300 μ S/cm in 2014 (Ref: Additional Simulations of the Regional Water Quality Impact Assessment Model, March 2015, Fig 3.25, pg 26). The Thompsons Creek Reservoir now has a salinity of 550 μ S/cm and with proposed modification, salinity is predicted to increase to over 600 μ S/cm apparently because of the increased proportion of mine water to creek in flows to TCR.

Further, as the TCR discharges to Lake Lyell and Mount Piper Power Station so storage capacity is never exceeded, the latter claim is misleading. It appears that mine water in TCR may flow to Lake Lyell, avoiding the reverse osmosis water treatment plant. The only check on these flows is daily monitoring of water from Springvale mine into TCR and the consent discharge limit now at 5760 ML. It is a relatively simple matter to sample flows at a time of day when pumps may not operate to avoid identification of a non-compliance.

Mine water flows have significantly altered the chemistry of TCR (200 to 550 μ S/cm) and caused discharges to Lake Lyell that may have impacted the Coxs River ecology.

Unconfirmed reports of large flows into TCR from Springvale mine and from TCR into Lake Lyell as well as elevated salinity of over 500 μ S/cm suggests a potential for Springvale mine to discharge mine water to the Coxs River catchment and use of TCR to avoid or minimise its water treatment obligations under this consent.

Centennial's track record of environmental damage

Centennial has failed to demonstrate that it can operate responsibly in the Gardens of Stone region without causing irreversible damage to the environment. Records of environmental incidents and harm, consent and licence non-compliances, and inaccurate predictions of environmental impacts from its operations suggest that current impact predictions in the environmental assessment for this modification should not be relied upon.

An audit of Centennial's mining licences for the past five years has found at least 134 licence non-compliances across its sites in the Gardens of Stone region. Centennial's non-compliance events in the region include:

- In 2022, Centennial breached its development consent for Airly mine causing major irreversible fractures to million-year-old sandstone pagoda formations in the Mugii Murum-ban State Conservation Area. The Department of Planning and Environment imposed a \$150,000 enforceable undertaking on Centennial. The company has since mined outside its approved area at Airly Mine, which is a class 1 reportable offence under NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act*.
- In 2017, the EPA prosecuted Centennial after its coal waste storage at Clarence mine spilt 2330 tonnes of coal fines into the Wollangambe River and caused damage within the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, and Centennial was fined over \$1 million and clean-up operations took 12 months.
- In 2015, Centennial was fined \$15,000 when toxic coal sludge was illegally discharged from Springvale mine sediment storage ponds into downstream wetlands.

- In 2011, Centennial acknowledged that the Federal Environment Minister considered its mining activities to have had a significant impact on Temperate Highland Peat Swamps on Sandstone, namely Narrow Swamp, East Wolgan Swamp and Junction Swamp and entered a \$1.45 million enforceable undertaking with the Commonwealth under s 486DA of the EPBC Act. These swamps have not recovered and are expected to be permanently lost.

Springvale mine should not be trusted with this proposed modification that potentially allows for avoidance of mine water treatment at the \$200 water treatment plant.

Additional Water Treatment required

If the capacity or capability of the 42ML/day Springvale Water Treatment Plant has been exceeded and it cannot treat additional mine water from Springvale Mine, then an additional water treatment plant (or existing plant capacity) is required, not further extension of interim arrangements for two years through a modification proposals.

The mine water being pumped from Angus Place and Springvale mines requires thorough scrutiny by expert panels, such as the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development and the Independent Expert Advisory Panel on Underground Mining, as well as the Independent Planning Commission.

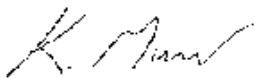
Centennial Coal should withdraw proposed modification 9 to the Springvale Water Treatment Facility consent. Centennial Coal should at least be required to install a reverse osmosis treatment plant capacity to treat the additional mine water currently going to TCR. Centennial Coal should have planned for the extra treatment plant capacity, not to extend an interim water management arrangement.

Discharges from an additional reverse osmosis treatment plant should have a salinity of 30µS/cm to have a neutral effect on the salinity of the Coxs River headwaters that would receive this discharge. The discharges should not be via Ovens Dam and then LDP001 WCS (formerly LDP009 Springvale mine).

The modification proposal should be refused consent as it is not in the interest of Sydney water consumers, citizens who care for the protection and proper management Sydney's water resources and accountability of planning processes.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,



Keith Muir
Hon. Project Officer
Wilderness Australia

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