

One step closer to saving the beautiful Gardens of Stone

Conservation groups have warmly welcomed a strong recommendation by the NSW Department of Planning that the proposed Coalpac open-cut coal mine near Lithgow be refused because of its impacts on the natural and scenic values of the Gardens of Stone.

The Director General's assessment report found that the impacts of the mine on the conservation values of the site would be *'unacceptable'*, and that *'the site is fundamentally unsuitable for such a large scale open-cut mining proposal'*.

The report recommends the Planning Assessment Commission refuse the open cut mine proposal, stating that the *'mining operations as currently proposed would be incompatible with the natural setting which includes unique rock formations and sensitive and important biodiversity areas'*.

Lithgow Environment Group spokesperson Chris Jonkers said: "This decision is a victory for common sense. This ill-conceived mining proposal posed an unacceptable risk to public health in the local area and threatened to destroy a large part of the Ben Bullen State Forest, the western gateway to the iconic Gardens of Stone."

Blue Mountains Conservation Society Vice-President Tara Cameron said: "The department's decision is a vitally important step towards lasting protection for the Gardens of Stone. We trust that the Planning Assessment Commission will now make the right decision and refuse this destructive mining proposal once and for all."

Colong Foundation spokesperson Elizabeth Elenius said: "This stunning landscape deserves permanent protection for its unique natural values and its potential as an iconic tourist destination. The area has outstanding scenic value and is easily accessed from Sydney. The tourism potential of the Gardens of Stone would be severely compromised by a large scale open cut coal mine."

Nature Conservation Council Chief Executive Officer Pepe Clarke said: "We welcome the decision by the Department of Planning to recommend refusal of this destructive mine, and strongly urge the NSW Government to safeguard the Gardens of Stone by taking the necessary steps to reserve the area under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act*."

Background information:

- Coalpac Pty Ltd is seeking to significantly extend its open-cut mine by consolidating its Cullen Valley Mine and Invincible Colliery operations. If approved, the Coalpac Consolidation Project would produce up to 3.5 million tonnes of coal a year for 21 years.
- The Coalpac proposal involves open-cut mining along valleys and slopes on the western edge of the Ben Bullen State Forest, approximately 25km northwest of Lithgow. This area, also known as the Gardens of Stone, is characterised by well-established woodlands, sandstone cliff lines and rock formations known as pagodas.

- The Gardens of Stone is a complex of escarpments, narrow canyons, upland swamps, rock arches and pagodas that provides habitat for many plants and wildlife, including six nationally listed threatened species: the Regent Honeyeater, Spotted-Tail Quoll, Bathurst Copper Butterfly, Brushtailed Rock-wallaby and Powerful Owl.
- More than 800 submissions opposing the mine were received during the exhibition period. Community submissions raised concerns about health impacts from dust pollution, impacts on threatened species and destruction of unique geological features.
- The Office of Environment and Heritage expressed serious reservations about the mining proposal, including *'significant encroachment ... on a previously relatively undisturbed portion of Ben Bullen State Forest, the whole of which has long been identified by OEH as being of suitably high conservation value for future reservation under the National Parks and Wildlife Act'*.
- In December 2012, the Planning Assessment Commission recommended refusal of the proposal. The PAC will now consider the proposal for a second time, taking into account the strong recommendation from the Department of Planning that the mine be refused.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Director-General's Assessment Report (Summary), October 2013

<https://majorprojects.affinitylive.com/public/d378f3a9a670ed3cc49f6c1e8c0a339d/1.%20Coalpac%20Consolidation%20Project%20Director-General's%20Report%20Summary.pdf>

Office of Environment and Heritage, Submission, June 2012

<https://majorprojects.affinitylive.com/public/2e186de9d74bc0c92d7bdd19da9b5fc4/%20Coalpac%20Consolidation%20Project%20-%20OEH.pdf>

Frequently Asked Questions – Coalpac Assessment Report

<https://majorprojects.affinitylive.com/public/ae335a1b7af21e4e39495e5abb2a0667/Coalpac%20Consolidation%20Project%20FAQ.pdf>

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