

## **Gardens of Stone area faces new damage: Invincible open-cut mine approved**

**February 2018**

The independent Planning and Assessment Commission (PAC) has decided that Invincible Mine can restart open cut mining in the Gardens of Stone area and in the former Coalpac proposal area. The area is beside the Castlereagh Highway (the main road to Mudgee) and will extend the Invincible's devastated moonscape.

This is a complete back flip on the 2014 decision made by the PAC. Three years ago the PAC rejected a larger open cut proposal including the area saying that the highest and best use of the land was conservation.

This decision will encourage further destructive open cut mining proposals in the area.

Mine owners, Manildra Group, argued that the mine should reopen to supply coal to their Shoalhaven factory to assist in making ethanol for petrol blends. Even though they are currently sourcing the coal they want including from a nearby mine.

The approval observes a buffer zone around nearby pagodas but, very importantly, it does not protect the total pagoda landscape complex from permanent destruction. Previous PACs in 2013 and 2014 recognised that the slopes and woodlands associated with the pagoda formations were essential for the protection of the animals and plants including threatened species that lived there.

The endangered Purple Copper Butterfly, 'one of Australia's rarest butterflies' uses the land to be mined. However, the PAC has said mining can go ahead and has agreed to a proposal to remove and replant the butterfly's essential habitat, a *Bursaria spinosa* subspecies, and the associated anthills. This "translocation trial". This is highly unlikely to work and will put this rare and beautiful butterfly at further risk.

A trial is a test or experiment. We believe it has very little chance of success so shouldn't be used as a solution. A trial does not have to succeed; instead it just provides an example of whether the procedure worked or not. However, there is no second chance once the butterfly's habitat is permanently destroyed.

The loss of habitat for the endangered broad headed snake will most likely be compensated for by paying money into the NSW government's species conservation fund. This option should not be available because it does not protect the specific community of threatened species that the proposal will harm.

The Society oppose the destruction of the conservation values of the unprotected Gardens of Stone region. The Society will continue to seek full protection of the Gardens of Stone Stage 2 Proposal area as State Conservation Areas.