

Large Public Meeting Voices Opposition to Goldmine in Wombat State Forest

On Sunday 15th July about 350 members of the community voiced their opposition to a recently approved five hectare open cut gold mine in the Wombat State Forest. The meeting was organised by Wombat Forestcare.

The packed Bullarto Hall was addressed by speakers from Wombat Forestcare who outlined the lack of consultation and possible environmental impacts if the approved mine goes ahead. Many people could not fit in the hall and listened as best as possible from doorways.

A mining licence was granted for the 5 hectare site in July 2007 and a Work Plan approved by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) on the 30 May, 2012. The gold mine is to be located 5km south of Bullarto in the headwaters of Heritage listed Lerderderg River and adjacent to Crowley Creek, which becomes the Lerderderg River. To enable the mine to proceed 3.8 hectares of forest will be cleared.

The meeting was chaired by David Stephens from Wombat Forestcare who acknowledged the traditional owners and welcomed the community.

Gayle Osborne spoke about the lack of community consultation. The meeting was informed that Wombat Forestcare was contacted by the mining representative only after the mine had been approved. Wombat Forestcare was then only provided with a very small amount of information, most of which remains unverified.

Wombat Forestcare denied that it had been involved in a community consultation process as stated by John Mitas, Department of Primary Industries (DPI). Gayle also highlighted the anger in the community at the lack of community consultation. This sentiment was echoed by many people at the meeting.

Gayle also outlined some information on the impacts of the mine on local wildlife, including Wombats and aquatic stream life. She pointed to the high likelihood that the critically endangered Common Bent-wing Bat inhabits the historic mine shafts on the site.

Murray Ralph provided details of the mining operation as outlined in a copy of part of the Work Plan supplied by the mining company's representative. It was highlighted that Wombat Forestcare was unsure whether this information is in fact from a copy of the approved DPI Work Plan. Wombat Forestcare has now made a formal application a copy of the approved Work Plan and is awaiting this information.

Murray described the location and extent of the proposed mine, the mining methods that will be potentially used at the site, the removal of 5,000 tons from the reef, the stocking of contaminated soil on site and the potential impacts of trucking this to Maldon.

Murray then outlined the possible environmental impacts that may occur should the proposed mine proceed. These included; the impacts on the near pristine upper reaches of the Lerderderg River; the removal of 3.8 hectares of native vegetation including over 60 mature eucalypts; the lack of fauna surveys including surveys for the critically endangered Common Bent-wing Bat; the lack of protection for the Wombats on the site; the lack of adequate fauna surveys; and the inadequate planning for revegetation of the site and an inadequate bond of \$30,000.

The financial viability of the proposed venture was then questioned given the potentially low gold yields, costs of the operation and 'external' costs of the mine to the environment and local roads, etc.

Several members of the audience also made relevant comments relating to the lack of consultation, environmental impacts and inadequate legislation and planning requirements regarding this mine and mining developments in general. John Walter from Malmsbury Landcare detailed similar experiences regarding an exploration lease.

The meeting was then opened for questions which were answered by speakers and members of the audience. Many people also stated their intentions to take further action by writing letters to the Minister and contacting relevant authorities. Wombat Forestcare has been overwhelmed with support for the campaign to stop this mine and large numbers of people are involving themselves in assisting.

A number of motions were passed at towards the end of the meeting.

Motion 1: That the Meeting of the local community at Bullarto Hall on Sunday 15 July 2012 request that the Minister for Energy and Resources, Hon Michael O'Brien MLA, establish an Environmental Monitoring Committee which includes at least three members of the local Bullarto community to review the Work Plan for mining licence MIN5349 for mining in the Wombat State Forest.

Moved: Gavin Jameson

Seconded: Gayle Osborne.

Carried by all present at the meeting except one person (who felt the mine should be halted immediately).

Motion 2: That the Meeting of the local community at Bullarto Hall on Sunday 15 July 2012 request the Minister for Energy and Resources, Hon Michael O'Brien MLA rescind the mining licence MIN5349 for mining in the Wombat State Forest.

Moved: Murray Ralph

Seconded:

Carried Unanimously

Motion 3: That the Meeting of the local community at Bullarto Hall on Sunday 15 July 2012 call on State and Federal Government to act to prevent the activation of any further mining leases in primary water catchment areas.

Moved: David Stephens

Seconded: Murray Ralph

Carried Unanimously

All present at the meeting were thanked for their attendance and support. The meeting was closed at 2-30pm.

Wombat Forestcare would like to thank all who attended and the massive offers of support and information. We are attempting to work through all this but as a first step we have outlined the issues for those who wish to write to the Minister for Minerals and Energy.