

Lue Action Group

Media Briefing Pack

v1.0 - 22 April 2023

LUE ACTION GROUP

- Formed in 2011 to address a proposal to dig a massive open cut Lead, Zinc and Silver mine just 2kms from the village of Lue in the Mudgee Region of the Central West of NSW.
- The Lue Action Group is run by a team of volunteers who are local residents of Lue and the surrounding areas.
- We are dismayed, disgusted and disappointed that a beautiful area of outstanding natural beauty could soon be destroyed by a huge scar on the landscape that emits airborne toxic lead dust, causes water scarcity and creates acid mine drainage issues that will continue far into the future. Bowdens have also recently applied to extend their exploration licence for metallic minerals to large areas north and east of Lue, much closer to Mudgee and to Rylstone than to Lue.
- We are very concerned that this could be the beginning of an extensive spread of toxic heavy metal mining throughout the beautiful Mudgee tourist region that has so recently won such prestigious awards and created so many jobs from tourism.
- Our support base numbers in the hundreds today and increasing weekly, coming from all over but mostly they are people from the Lue, Mudgee, Rylstone region who oppose the development of the Bowdens project.

BOWDENS PROJECT

- The Bowdens project is situated in a spectacular greenfield landscape – an area of outstanding natural beauty in the Central West of NSW - on an elevated site, at the headwaters of the Lawson Creek which is a major tributary of the Cudgegong River. The mine is proposed to be dug within just 2km of Lue, a beautiful village between the thriving agricultural and tourism towns of Rylstone/Kandos and Mudgee, which was voted Top Tourism Town in Australia for 2021 and 2022.
- The mine, as planned, is to comprise:
 - Three open cut pits, across 52 hectares
 - A tailings dam covering 117 hectares, with a 56 metre high dam wall
 - A processing plant and associated infrastructure
 - A dump pile for potentially acid forming waste rock, across 77 hectares
 - A stockpile for low grade ore and oxide ore, across 22 hectares
 - A final void of approximately 53 hectares

- Total mine life of roughly 23 years, and Bowdens is actively exploring for further mineral deposits and is exploring options for an extended underground mining operation in the area.
- The stated intent is to extract the following principal ores (Bowdens FAQs):
 - Lead – 130,000 tonnes
 - Zinc – 190,000 tonnes
 - Silver – 1,417 tonnes

KEY ISSUES:

The mine is open cut, in a greenfield site in the middle of the popular Mudgee – Rylstone tourist trail, only two kilometres from Lue village.

1. Lead exposure.

- Bowdens plans to dig up and disturb 130,000 tonnes of lead at Lue, two kilometres from the village primary school.
- Any exposure to lead is dangerous, and chronic exposure can lead to decreased IQ and cognitive function in children, as well as multiple adverse impacts in pregnant women and adults. See Appendix B for more details from the World Health Organisation.
- Bowdens’ modelling fails to take into account lead exposure from dust carrying lead particles, which the NSW Department of Planning & Environment recognised as a key pathway for lead particles to leave the site.
- Bowdens do not have a suitable water management plan to suppress dust during dry seasons

2. Tailings Dam

- Bowdens plans to build a large tailings dam across a fault line at the headwaters of the Lawson Creek, which flows into the Cudgegong River at Mudgee.
- Holding poisonous materials like cyanide, arsenic and lead particles, Bowdens own modelling predicts 1.6 megalitres of leakage every single day (best case scenario).

3. Acid Mine Drainage

- More than half of all waste rock excavated (26 million tonnes) will be potentially acid forming. Bowdens wants to stack it above the Lawson Creek water table in an area covering over 77 hectares, creating a major acid mine drainage risk (see McArthur River mine links below)
- Acid mine drainage can, and does, threaten drinking water supplies and irrigation systems downstream from a mining site.

4. No Merits-based Appeal Process

- There is a failure of Government approach to planning approvals which undermines the confidence the community has in the decision-making process.
- No confidence from the local community and stakeholders in the assessment process means *no social licence*.
- As the IPC held a public hearing, the community has no right of merit appeal to the Land and Environment Court.

SUMMARY

- This is a greenfield development. That means every impact created by the mine will be new to those who experience them.
- Today, the people of Lue and surrounds do not have to worry about the levels of lead in their blood. If this mine proceeds, they will.
- Today, primary producers don't have to worry about how lead contamination might impede their market access domestically and overseas. If this mine proceeds, they will.
- Today, Lawson Creek water users do not have to worry about whether or not their water is safe for stock and domestic use. If this mine proceeds, they will.
- Today, residents on the outskirts of Mudgee who rely on bore water do not have to worry about their bores running dry more frequently. If this mine proceeds, they will.

OUR MISSION

To stop Bowdens Mine from proceeding with damaging the Mudgee Region's Health, Environment and Tourism.

LUE ACTION GROUP (LAG) PRESIDENT- BIO

- Tom Combes is the current President of the Lue Action Group and one of the founding members.
- His family moved to the Lawson Creek Valley, east of Mudgee, at Havilah in 1881 and Lue in 1923. The Combes family currently own and run 'Lue Station' which is located on the Southern, Eastern and Western Borders of the village of Lue. They also operate the "Louee Enduro and Motocross Complex" an off-road motorcycle facility 2km South East of Lue Village and on "Lue Station".
- Tom is also the current Captain of the Lue/Havilah Bush Fire Brigade as well as a current Project Officer for Bingman's Landcare.

CONTACT

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Website for quick background and links to technical reports: www.lueactiongroup.org

APPENDIX A

ISSUES – ADDITIONAL DETAIL

1. Surface Water

- Bowdens do not have an adequate water supply.
- The EIS document from 2020 states clearly the project is not viable without an external water supply. Bowdens initially proposed to pipe water from the Ulan coalfields.
- In 2022, they lodged an amendment to their application to remove this water supply pipeline and source all water from the site, i.e. from the Lawson Creek catchment.
- Earth Systems have raised concerns around the data supporting the site water balance.
- This Project does not have sufficient water, and the true water quantity and water quality impacts of the current proposal have not been adequately assessed.
- Expert detail by Shireen Baguley: [Link to detail](#)

2. Ground water

- On groundwater, this project raises more questions than it answers.
- The Middlemis review of the project consistently raises questions about the potential role of mapped fault structures beneath key mine site infrastructure like the tailings dam. Bowdens dismissed these concerns as being of little consequence.
- Our Groundwater expert Craig Flavel has detailed how this is just one example of the lack of clarity around impacts to groundwater from the mine, the corollary of this being the issue that adequate risk assessments have not been completed and the project should not be approved.
- Expert detail – Craig Flavel: [Link to detail](#)
- Expert detail – Peter Serov: [Link to detail](#)

3. Acid Mine Drainage

- Other than perhaps lead poisoning of humans and animals, acid mine drainage from the site bears the largest and longest-lasting risk to all stakeholders.
- We see three significant problems attached to this project in terms of acid mine drainage, each of which have been plainly called out by Earth Systems and are elaborated further in the detailed link by mining expert Michael White. Briefly:
 - The current design of the Waste Rock Emplacement is inappropriate and not fit for purpose,
 - The design of the tailings storage facility will allow seepage into the water table and is an unsuitable long-term solution with no appropriate mitigation strategy,
 - The final void pit lake is accepted by Bowdens and the Department of Planning to have a greater than 50% flowthrough risk. The mitigation strategy proposed of increasing the size of the lake by 50%, has not had its impacts assessed and is not something that should be worked out in the conditions of consent post approval.

- Expert detail by Michael White: [Link to detail](#)

4. Lead Dust & Suppression

- You need water to suppress dust. In an already water constrained area, we have concerns around the prevention of dust and dust-borne contaminants such as lead and heavy metals leaving the site. The DPE itself identified dust as the key pathway for heavy metals to leave the site.
- Bowdens acknowledge that “during dry weather periods, when evaporation is high, more water for dust suppression would be required”, yet Earth Systems identified that, now with all water to be drawn from the site, Bowdens have actually reduced the allocation of water for dust suppression from 204 to 133 megalitres a year, with no explanation or assessment of the impacts.
- This is just one example of the proponent shuffling numbers around to retrofit an inadequate water supply strategy to their broader mine design.
- Expert detail by Mark Taylor: [Link to detail](#)

5. Human Health

- Given that dust particles carrying heavy metals could leave the site, and that this project will produce 50 times more lead than silver, there are major uncertainties around the modelled risks to human health.
- The intrinsic link between an elevated site location and uncertain water availability raises serious doubt around the accuracy of the modelled outcomes for human health.
- Today, lead contamination is not a burden currently carried by the people of the Mudgee region. If this mine goes ahead, it will be.
- Expert detail by Barry Noller: [Link to detail](#)

6. Mine Precedents

- There are countless examples of poor, unproven mine design resulting in significant failures and damage to people and the environment.
- The complexity and technical resolution required to execute effective mine design is challenging for even the most experienced mining companies. Not only are their proposed designs inappropriate with no track record of success on this scale, but Bowdens have never operated a mine before and have no experience in constructing or managing these significant risks.
- Add to this the challenges posed by a tight balance sheet, and it’s not difficult to see why we have little confidence in their ability to operate the mine safely.

7. Social Impacts

- We have seen firsthand as villages like Wollar, Bylong, Bulga, Wybong and Ulan become ghost towns as a result of either the threat or reality of open cut mining on their doorstep.
- The lived reality of residents subjected to noise, vibration, traffic, dust, health risks and declining property value is always worse than modelling can account for.
- Irrespective of the number of jobs it may or may not create, is it truly appropriate to allow the project to continue, knowing it will mean residents nearby, including children and pregnant women, have to monitor the toxic lead levels in their blood as

a direct result? Especially that when elevated levels of lead detected in the blood, it is already too late and there will have been failures to manage airborne contaminants by Bowdens.

- Expert detail by Alison Ziller: [Link to detail](#)

8. Tourism

- The reputation this area has as a tourist destination is growing rapidly. We saw 691,000 people visit the Mudgee region in the four years ending 2019. In 2020-2021 alone, that number grew to 826,000.
- Our analysis shows 931 jobs were directly created due to visitor spending in the area in 2020-21; with tourism and agriculture spending combined creating 12 times the number of jobs the Bowdens mine will.
- The latest Mudgee Region Destination Management Plan 2020-2025 specifically addresses wellness tourism, identifying it as one of five primary experience themes. Wellness tourism is a growing sector globally, integrating sustainability as much as it does human health and wellbeing.
- Our region is poised to capitalise on this opportunity, and clearly already is, but there is a clear conflict between attracting tourists interested in high-quality local wine and food and having a wellness focus and the risks of lead mining, including lead poisoning and acid mine drainage.
- In it's Assessment Report, the DPE has attempted to paint a picture of an area in decline, with already degraded water systems, and little to no employment or employment prospects.
- The Assessment Report mentions the word tourism only three times over 115 pages. To exclude any meaningful mention or exploration of the role tourism plays in the region when considering the strategic context of the project is misleading. Even if this project had a 10% negative impact on tourism, that could be 93 jobs lost. How about 20%?
- These impacts have not been assessed.
- Expert detail by Karl Flowers: [Link to detail](#)

9. Agriculture

- In terms of agriculture, the Lawson Creek catchment that the DPE described as already degraded is in fact the lifeblood for numerous highly productive and highly profitable agricultural and food production businesses.
- Lue Action Group members alone run primary production businesses representing a benchmark earning value of over \$14.6 million per year which largely goes back into our community and region.
- Lawson Creek water facilitates the production of thousands of kilograms of high quality, beef, lamb, fine wool, grain, oilseeds, elite animal genetics, award winning olives, olive oil, grapes and wine for international and domestic markets, and thousands of bales of hay along irrigated flats close to Mudgee.
- What kind of damage will the reality or even the perception of lead contamination do to these industries?
- What will happen to these producers when there is no water left in the catchment?

- Who will buy our wine, our olive oil or our beef if Mudgee becomes synonymous with lead or heavy metal contamination?
- These impacts have not been assessed.

10. Biodiversity & Cultural Heritage

- The Lue area is home to a diverse collection of native flora and fauna, in particular the Koala, Regent Honey Eater, Spotted tail Quoll, Swift Parrot and Box Gum Woodland, which are all expected to be significantly impacted by the project.
- While Bowdens commits to creating biodiversity offsets as a way to manage the impact to these animals, the reality is that koalas and regent honeyeaters that use this area today will lose their habitat.
- Does this outcome actually align with the principles underlying the Federal EPBC Act? And when the true impacts to water have not been assessed, how can the Government be satisfied enough that the impacts on these plants and animals are truly known and understood to be able to approve the mine?
- Of the 52 Aboriginal artefacts surveyed on the site, 25 will be destroyed by this project.

APPENDIX B

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES/INFORMATION SOURCES

- **McArthur River Mine (Glencore) – Court Case**
 - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-17/mcarthur-river-mine-supreme-court-case-darwin/101985798>
 - <https://www.edo.org.au/2023/02/15/historic-court-action-over-mcarthur-river-mine-security-bond-commences/>
- **Mt Isa Smelter – Lead Poisoning Court Case**
 - <https://www.afr.com/companies/mining/glencore-goes-on-trial-over-mount-isa-lead-poisoning-claim-20220208-p59upg>
 - <https://www.afr.com/companies/mining/mum-s-chilling-blood-warning-in-glencore-lead-smelter-trial-20220509-p5ajsx>
- **Sunny Corner, Bathurst – News Article on impacts of Acid Mine Drainage**
 - <https://au.news.yahoo.com/dangerous-discovery-at-aussie-site-abandoned-100-years-ago-toxic-011653940.html>
- **World Health Organisation on Lead Poisoning**
 - <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/lead-poisoning-and-health>