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Metropolitan water supply under threat

Monday, 29 October 2001

Underground coal mining has placed metropolitan water supplies under threat, due to subsidence induced cracks, draining rivers.

A key feeder stream into Lake Avon, the sole supply of Wollongong's water has been seriously damaged by coal mining, environmentalists revealed today.

"We have inspected Native Dog Creek in the Metropolitan Catchment, on two occasions in the last month and it has stopped flowing. There are serious cracks in its rock bed as well as draining of a major rock pool, that must be full to allow transmission of water to the Dam. The damage is directly related to longwall coal mining at the BHP-Billiton Elouera Mine. For the sake of Wollongong's water supply, the damage must be stopped," said Jeff Angel, Director of Total Environment Centre.

"On our last visit it had rained three times in the previous two weeks but still no water flowed. The damage is shocking and a pristine stream that should be capable of supplying water forever is in bad shape. Other streams are also being damaged by the mining, with no effective remediation possible," said Keith Muir, Director of the Colong Foundation.

"The situation has reached a crisis in the protection of the water catchments.

The government's mining advocate has the sole say over longwall mining, while the supposed catchment protector, the Sydney Catchment Authority is powerless. The top priority should be the drinking water supply of millions of people in Wollongong and Sydney," said Mr Angel.

"The catchment situation will worsen greatly if the go-ahead is given to the proposed BHP-Billiton Dendrobium Mine. It has the largest longwalls ever seen in the region and even the company's consultants admit there will be stream damage. It is greedy mining with no regard for catchment protection," said Mr Muir.

The two groups said they will be intensifying their campaign to protect the catchments and stop the Dendrobium Mine.

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