



Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

**Re: Maules Creek Branch of the Country Women's Association of NSW Submission –
Rehabilitation of Mining and Resources Inquiry**

10 April 2017

Dear Sir/Madam;

The Maules Creek Branch of the Country Women's Association of NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Rehabilitation of Mining and Resources Inquiry. We will address the following aspects of the Inquiries Terms of Reference.

- a the cost of outstanding rehabilitation obligations of currently operating projects;*
- b the adequacy of existing regulatory, policy and institutional arrangements to ensure adequate and timely rehabilitation;*
- c the adequacy and transparency of financial mechanisms, including assurances, bonds and funds, to ensure that mining and resources projects are rehabilitated without placing a burden on public finances;*
- d the effectiveness of current Australian rehabilitation practices in safeguarding human health and repairing and avoiding environmental damage;*
- e the effectiveness of existing abandoned mines programs, with regard to repairing environmental damage and safeguarding human health;*
- f whether any mining or resources companies have engaged in conduct designed to avoid fulfilling their rehabilitation obligations;*
- g the potential social, economic and environmental impacts, including on matters of national environmental significance under the EPBC Act, of inadequate rehabilitation;*
- h. the potential social, economic and environmental benefits of adequate rehabilitation, including job opportunities in communities affected by job losses in the mining and resources sectors*

Maules Creek Branch of the Country Women's Association of NSW was established in 1923. In this submission, we would first like to show our respect and acknowledge the Gomeroi Traditional Custodians of the Land, of Elders past and present, on which we live and extend that respect to other Traditional Custodians of other Lands we are more generally referring to.

We are part of a wide network of women working towards improving the lives of women and their families. In 2016 the Country Women's Association of NSW successfully agreed on a policy position to transition our country from fossil fuel energy reliance to a renewable energy future.

In arguing the case, amongst other things, State Delegates agreed that governments' must

- shut care and maintenance mines and ensure that all mine sites are rehabilitated and paid for by the miners- including the infilling of mine voids and replication of original land contours.

Maules Creek- located in the Namoi Valley in North West NSW, is a beautiful place to live- however we now have three huge open cut coal mines at the heart of our critically endangered ecological community- the Leard State Forest.

We thank the Senate Standing Committee for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Leone Buckman,
President
Maules Creek Branch of the
Country Women's Association of NSW

Libby Laird
Agricultural and Environment Officer

Rehabilitation of Mining and Resources Senate Inquiry

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/MiningandResources

Our Maules Creek Branch's research has estimated that orderly, legally binding mine closure and rehabilitation will create positive economic, social and environmental outcomes running into the tens of billions of dollars. Such a huge recovery task, must be achieved with legally binding Federal government processes. We believe that this would be an innovative, environmental and economic positive for the people of Australia through accurate environmental restoration; providing much valued rehabilitation jobs during the transition.

Recommendation: For the Federal government to conduct a national review and assess what will be the cost to government- and ultimately the people of Australia if the result of this inquiry is to adopt a business as usual approach to rehabilitation of abandoned and operating mines.

We are aware that across our state, no effective open cut mine rehabilitation has resulted from current NSW State Laws and practices. From our experience "the most stringent environmental and social conditions in the world," are often not enforceable and are regularly modified for the economic benefit of the mining company. This coupled with the fact that State royalties are attached to mining decisions made, creates the situation where the current mine planning and management systems do not and cannot produce satisfactory outcomes to the community or the environment. State EPA and DoPE compliance jurisdictions are placed in a difficult situation. For a progressive government in a transitioning, society and economy this can't continue.

Recommendation: Federal Government to establish National standards with legally binding progressive rehabilitation targets applied during the mines operational life of all mines and adequate upfront cash bonds that reflect the true cost of rehabilitation.

At Maules Creek CWA we are continually startled to find that the Maules Creek Mine approval and Boggabri Coal and Tarrawonga expansion approvals and many subsequent modifications to each project were and are continuing to be approved 100% of the time. Particularly when there are so many seemingly unresolved issues and opaqueness around regional strategies, biodiversity offsets, air quality and rehabilitation and conservation bonds and plans.

Recommendation: The Federal Government change the corporate mine rehabilitation liability annual reporting to ensure investors, regulators and the broader community are fully aware of the levels of rehabilitation liabilities being carried by mining companies.

At Maules Creek we value our personal freedom and understand our reliance on the Earth's natural systems. Through our own observations and engagement with mining in our community, the depletion of the Earth's resources has been brought into sharp focus. Daily we witness the ongoing loss of natural biodiversity habitat, high security water flow allocation to coal washing and diminished audible and visible air quality.

Further, our Forest that was described by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage as "irreplaceable"- the biodiversity sink for our region is in decline. Groundwater drawdown was modelled in the various companies' EAs. Then there was the use of the NSW State's Police Force in Maules Creek to silence the many community voices expressing concern about the destruction of a sustainable environment. A solution, so this never happens to another community again, must be found.

Recommendation: We believe a Federal Environmental Protection Agency must be established for mine and resources rehabilitation oversight.

We are just one community labouring under this breakdown in our natural systems. Inland NSW cannot afford to gamble further with resource depletion and species extinction. We respectfully ask that the Federal Government step in and reassert the prime importance of ecological values provided by our natural environment and ensure it is restored. We believe the Government has jurisdiction to fix inadequate rehabilitation, mine voids and abandonment.

Recommendation: Establish a national abandoned mines commission including all states and territories, industry and community stakeholders, responsible for coordinating a binding national response to abandoned mines.

We are aware that two of the three mines in our State Forest are intending to leave final voids- toxic pit lakes- whose legacy will last for 1,000 years. This has occurred because the proponents successfully applied to the State Government and the State Government has given permission for this to be the case. Persistent lobbying of State Government's by mining companies seems to impact on decision-making. The burning of our natural capital, removal and running down of our biodiversity, land and water and a "keeping costs down" business model makes coal seem cheap. But it is very expensive in reality. Its cheapness comes at the price of the environment and the community. We ask that this imbalance be rectified going forward.

Recommendation: We believe that final voids should be closed, mine voids should be infilled and there must be a replication of original land contours. Further, rehabilitation funds should be sufficient to rehabilitate mine sites and close final voids. The polluter pays principle must operate and Federal oversight is required.

Water is life. We at Maules Creek Branch of the CWA of NSW are concerned about the depths of the pit lakes slated to be left by local mining and the impact on our groundwater levels and potential contamination. Contamination and permanent loss of ground water will sterilise the viability of our community and other coal-affected communities. Added to this, our changing weather patterns, the redirection of high security water to coal washing and the massive voids to be left threaten, the long-term liveability of all species in our wild and rural landscapes.

Recommendation: That money should be retained for monitoring of groundwater levels and contamination and actions taken to stop salt or heavy metal leaching into soils or aquifers.

Our view from Maules Creek is that now is not the time to continue playing politics with our environment. Even in the short term- now is the time. The Federal Government has historically led the States on Environmental legislation. We respectfully request to have our natural capital restored and paid for by those who destroy it. We must have a healthy, biologically diverse and wild environment to live and work in- now and for future generations.

Recommendation: Act now, so that what is left behind is a healthy landscape, fitting of a government that is in control of legislating for our transition to a low carbon economy and is respectful to the community and environment.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit to the Senate Standing Rehabilitation of Mining and Resources Inquiry.

Maules Creek Branch of CWA of NSW
10/4/17