



8th December, 2024

Dear Minister Penny Sharpe

Kindlehill Senior School has been conducting a geographical investigation into the leaching of heavy metal contaminants into Bulgamatta (the Grose River) from the abandoned Canyon Colliery. The Dalpura headwater, which is contaminated with zinc and nickel, runs into Bulgamatta and sits within our Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

We have met with Dharug Elder, Uncle Chris Tobin, and examined the data of Professor Ian Wright and Dr Nakia Belmer. We have learnt of the importance of macro-invertebrates to healthy waterways and the ecological impacts of high levels of zinc and nickel which will likely continue long into the future unless the leaching from the Canyon Colliery is addressed.

We have been asking ourselves, what can we do to stop this leaching, to protect this beautiful valley and its precious waters? We are currently exploring bioremediation and ways the local community might support this. However, it is our view that for real impact, the NSW EPA needs to take action and leadership in restoring the waterway and surrounding land.

We know that when a community cares about something, it can change things for the better. Big things can happen. In 2014 Ian Wright and his colleagues released a report on the Clarence Colliery which releases water into the Wollangambe River. Their studies had found a 90% decrease in macroinvertebrates in the water closer to the mine and concentrated levels of zinc and nickel in the soil, water and animals. They took their findings to the community and the EPA. Through this action things changed, Clarence Colliery was fined, and stricter regulation was put in place. The response and following action meant that now the ecosystem is in recovery.

With this as our inspiration, we invite the NSW EPA, as a gift to our World Heritage Area soon to be 25 years old, to implement exemplary practices for rehabilitation and restoration of the abandoned Canyon Colliery site. This would effectively ensure that this special place would remain healthy, as a World Heritage Area should be. It could also provide a best practice example for cleaning up after the many other mines that continue to leach toxins into waterways and ecosystem both in Australia and globally. It would be a significant gesture of ecological restoration in what the United Nations has determined, the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

We have learned from Uncle Chris Tobin and Uncle Lex Dadd that Bulgamatta (The Grose Valley), is the last undisturbed part of Dharug Country. Through it runs an ancient river that

has shaped the land over millions of years. Bulgamatta meets with Dyrubbin (The Nepean), bringing all the stories, sediments and anything else she collects, to that great river system that nourishes the land from here through Darkinjung and Kuring-gai country and out into the ocean. What we do here matters for miles. It matters to platypus, eels, dragonflies and dolphins. To the many other more-than-human-kin we share our Earth with.

There is another story, another incredibly ancient one, as old as the river. This place was once warm swampy forest, and where that forest fell and decayed there are now long seams of coal. In 1959 Canyon Colliery, a longwall coal mine was established above the head waters of Bulgamatta. They operated there until 1997 when they finished their operations and closed their mine. While they did remove much of their infrastructure, their mine continues to release water that is highly contaminated with zinc and other heavy metals into Bulgamatta.

For this geographical investigation, we have also collaborated with The Blue Mountains Conservation Society, who have previously campaigned for the restoration of this site with the NSW EPA. It is our understanding that at this time government testing was conducted, the results confirming the findings of Professor Wright and Dr Belmer.

On Sunday, 8th December, we are holding an event at Govett's Leap to inform our Blue Mountains families of the significance of Bulgamatta in our WHA. We are highlighting ways the local community can participate in conservation and protection of places of special significance such as Bulgamatta.

Our findings indicate that that these places are incredible. They have huge cultural significance for First Nations People. They are rich in biodiversity and beauty. They are part of the systems of life that sustain us. Another finding is that community matters. That what we lend our voices to and take action on, do make a difference.

We urge serious consideration of our proposal, that in 2025, a gift of restoration by government and community be given to Bulgamatta, the restoration of this waterway and an end to the contamination from the Canyon Colliery.

We look forward to making change as a partnering of government and local community, in protecting Bulgamatta from further contamination and providing an example of what is possible when we are truly in solidarity with our wild places.

On behalf of The Kindlehill Senior School Team

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