Thursday, 3 February, 2011

Letter to the Editor of the Sunday Telegraph

Your recent report about the Woronora Dam’s low levels also mentions the Metropolitan Mine expansion (‘Underground mine cracks drain dam water, Sunday Telegraph, 30/01/11).

For your information, underground mining allowed by the Metropolitan Mine expansion has only just begun in a small area some 1.5km from the reservoir itself. To date, the mine’s monitoring program has shown absolutely no indication of water loss due to mining, either from the streams above the mine or from the reservoir downstream.

The merits of the proposed expansion of the Metropolitan mine were closely examined by the Department of Planning and the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC), which included specially-appointed independent experts, before approval was given in 2009.

Both the Department and the PAC found the risk of the mine causing water loss from the dam was “very low”. Nevertheless, strict conditions were imposed on the company to ensure any water loss from the dam or its catchment due to mining would be “negligible”.

The approval included a barrier to protect the Waratah Rivulet, meaning 8.6 million tonnes of coal with an estimated market value of $1-2 billion, will not be mined.

Furthermore, the Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA) has advised that historical rainfall figures for the past 10 years indicate the Woronora catchment has received lower than average rainfall throughout that period, similar to that experienced during the period of drought in the 1940s.

Since 2003 there have been variable environmental releases of water for river health from Woronora Dam. These environmental water releases increased in 2009. These releases are designed to mimic the natural flow of the river. All flows from low rainfall events are released to the downstream river. High rainfall events, or major storms, are necessary to make a significant impact on the dam level.

Yours sincerely,

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