



# Sutherland Shire Environment Centre

PO Box 589 Sutherland NSW 1499 | [office@ssec.org.au](mailto:office@ssec.org.au)  
[www.ssec.org.au](http://www.ssec.org.au) | ABN 96 127 431 611

## Statement - Woronora petition parliamentary debate, 4 June, 2020

*Sutherland Shire Environment Centre is an independent, not-for-profit, community organisation.*

We have consistently stated that water security is a matter that goes beyond politics – no matter what anyone’s political leanings, or position on coal. Woronora Reservoir, our water supply, is a critical public asset that is simply too important to jeopardise. The petition to protect our water supply was started in good faith with the hope that the democratic process would allow community voices to be heard.

We do not believe the recent parliamentary debate applied proper scrutiny to this matter, and we do not accept the government’s assurances that the damage occurring in the Woronora Reservoir catchment is insignificant.

To all the people who took the time to gather petition signatures, to send us the completed petitions, to speak to other people about the issue, call and email the politicians – we thank you, and are so very sorry that you have been ignored. It would be understandable if you are now feeling cynical about our democratic parliamentary process.

The positive aspect of our efforts – on your part and ours - is that so many more people now realise what is taking place at Woronora Reservoir. The alternative to voicing our concerns is to say nothing, and allow the mining to proceed with no opposition whatsoever.

The debate did not achieve the outcome we were hoping, but community opposition to the mine is clear, and this opposition crosses all sides of the political spectrum, despite the failure of both major parties to take any effective political action.

The question we now have to consider is what action can be taken that will be effective.

We’d like to be able to offer an immediate solution, but we are dealing with a multinational mining company that has political access and influence – more than we anticipated. As we’ve learnt over the last few months this company has decades of experience combating community opposition.

We understand the Nature Conservation Council are considering legal action. At the moment that seems the best avenue, and we will keep you posted as this progresses. We are also considering organising a larger rally once social distancing restrictions are lifted.

In terms of the content of the debate, for people who watched this in full, you would have seen that Lee Evans was the only local Sutherland Shire State MP who spoke - and he spoke in support of the mining company, Peabody, not local residents. At the end of his three minute speech, Mr Evans stated that it would not answer all of our questions. He is correct.

Our two other local State MPs, [Mark Speakman](#) MP and [Eleni Petinos](#) MP did not appear to be in the Chamber when the debate was taking place. They ignored the requests of thousands of local residents who asked them to speak up to protect our water. For Mr Evans, Mr Speakman and Ms Petinos, yes, there are more questions we would like answered. We have listed these below.

## Woronora petition parliamentary debate – Questions for our local State MPs

- Why was a Nationals MP from the upper Hunter Nationals with two Peabody mines in his electorate chosen to speak instead of our local representatives? The Nationals MP, Michael Johnsen, did not contact Sutherland Shire Environment Centre prior to the debate to discuss any of our concerns.
- We would like to know why the politicians who spoke made no mention of issues raised by over 20 independent scientists, who have called for greater scrutiny about the mining taking place in our Special Area catchments? These scientists have questioned the ‘science’ that has been applied to justify the mining taking place, and have called for mining in our water catchments to be suspended "until the cumulative impacts and consequences of mining to date can be reliably assessed and quantified." They have noted the government's "dependence on assessment reports prepared by consultants selected and funded by mining companies", and have stated that "such reports cannot be regarded as independent".
- We would like to know why our local State MPs and the Department of Planning have been sending letters to constituents advising the mining is being ‘independently’ monitored by the ‘Woronora Reservoir Impact Strategy Panel’ without disclosing that this Panel is ‘engaged’ by Peabody?
- Several speakers claimed there were negligible water losses from the Reservoir. We note the Department of Planning has rejected requests by WaterNSW for a more detailed water balance study that might determine the accuracy of this claim. We would like clarification as to why the Department of Planning has rejected the request for a more detailed water balance study by WaterNSW, and has instead taken the advice of consultants who receive grants, and continuing employment, consultancies from the mining industry?
- We would like to know why the Water Minister and Shadow Water Minister did not mention the Water Act and its requirement "to protect and enhance the quality and quantity of water in declared catchment areas"? We do not believe there is any ‘enhancement’ taking place at Woronora, and we do not accept the government’s assurances that the damage occurring in the Woronora Reservoir catchment is negligible. We note WaterNSW’s Submission to the recent Independent Expert Panel looking into mining in the catchment which states –  
“An issue which particularly concerns WaterNSW is that it is anticipated that any additional increases in iron, manganese and possibly aluminum and other species dissolved from undermined catchments will impact on raw water quality delivered to Sydney Water and other customers...metals transported to reservoirs in particulate and/or dissolved forms are more likely to be precipitated and build up in the lake sediments over time.”

We would like to know why the Water Minister and Shadow Water Minister drew on the Independent Expert Panel report to claim there is no damage – and did not mention that this report also states that water returning to the surface from mine workings can ‘leach metals’, and this ‘needs increased attention in mining proposals, especially in the Special Areas where cumulative impacts could have serious negative consequences for reservoir water quality’.

- We would like to know why none of the speakers in the debate mentioned the 25 local community groups and environmental conservation organisations that have called for the mining to be stopped?
- We would like to know why the speakers in the debate referred to the history of the Metropolitan mine without once mentioning that it was bought by the Peabody in 2007? Why did only one of the speakers mention Peabody by name, once, obscuring references to the company from the parliamentary Hansard record? Why was Peabody's environmental record not mentioned? Why did the speakers talk of the contribution this mining makes to the economy but not mention that over the last 5 years Peabody made \$16.5 billion dollars while paying no tax?
- Why did none of the speakers mention that Peabody dismissed 150 workers from the mine the week prior to the debate, and that the mine is now employing around 200 workers, or less? We note some of the speakers made reference to 3,500 jobs being jeopardised, claiming that BlueScope is dependent on Peabody's Metropolitan mine to continue its operations – this is incorrect. BlueScope Steelworks sources coal from several South Coast mines. Much of the coal from these mines is exported via the Port Kembla Coal Terminal. The same terminal could be used to import coal from the Bowen Basin in QLD. It does not have to come from beneath the Special Areas of Greater Sydney Water Catchment.
- We ask why the debate was re-scheduled at a time the public gallery in parliament was closed and public gatherings were still not permitted due to social distancing restrictions? Was this intended to prevent the possibility of community protests? Why was the debate rescheduled immediately prior to a long weekend when people were allowed to leave Sydney for the first time in months?

**Mr Evans, Mr Speakman, and Ms Petinos – this is an open letter, and we would like a response to these questions and the issues we have raised here.**

**Our water supply should not look like this.**

