



Media Release – Gibsons Open Cut

20 January 2014

Community Group Alerts Government Regulator

SOMR discovers toxic sediment dumped at Halls Peak

Last week, representatives of the Save Our Macleay River (SOMR) group met with representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Derelict Mines Office (DMO) at Gibsons Open Cut, a large abandoned mine on the Chandler River. The meeting came about because of concerns raised by SOMR over "de-sludging" of containment dams.

Gibsons Open Cut in the Halls Peak area is ranked among the top 50 derelict mines causing environmental concern in NSW. Efforts have been made to contain run off from the site. However if contaminated water and sediments leave the site, it all ends up in the Chandler River, which runs into the Macleay.

SOMR's interest had been sparked by reports about recent explorations by Precious Metal Resources which could potentially lead to large new mines in the Macleay catchment.

“When we went up there in November, we saw newly built dams with very brightly coloured water and we noticed that the dams had recently been 'cleaned' by dredging the toxic sediment and dumping it into a gully where it washes into the river”, said SOMR chairman Arthur Bain.

In December, a short video and photos of the mine site were sent to the Manager of the EPA's New England Region in Armidale, Simon Smith. He arranged a site inspection by EPA and DM officers for mid January and offered to meet SOMR members immediately after the inspection.

Arthur Bain reports, “the inspection found that a contractor had cleaned out the bottom dams which are designed to catch toxic sediments. Instead of carting the contaminated sludge to a specifically constructed holding area, they dumped it all into the bush besides the dam.”

Soil and water samples were taken and SOMR members were assured that a full

investigation would take place. The Derelict Mines Office (DMO) will be investigating and asking questions of the contractor who completed the work. Hopefully this will lead to the problem being fixed as soon as possible - preferably before the next big rain.

“We wonder why none of the regulatory bodies had checked on the work. Perhaps their problem is that they don't get sufficient funding from the government to meet their huge role. Therefore it is up to community groups like SOMR to work with them to protect our water” said Mr Bain.

“Of course, it remains to be seen what action will be taken. It shows that we cannot afford to take our eyes off any work in the Macleay catchment which could impact on our river system. This is a significant success for SOMR. It proves the importance of community vigilance.”

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