

What Do They Owe the Land?

In 2014 Wayne Hamilton purchased 106 acres in the Rockvale region, in the Macleay catchment, near Armidale. He was aware that there was a 20 acre mining lease, unused since the late 1980's on the property, and that the lease owners had a responsibility to rehabilitate the site. The lease owners are Hillgrove Resources (HR), an international mining company based in South Australia, not to be confused with Hillgrove Mine, about 20kms away from Wayne's property.



According to Wayne the terms of the lease require HR to ensure that no water leaves the lease, and that rubbish is not to be stored on the site. Wayne has serious concerns about land stability, soil contaminants entering a nearby waterway that runs into the Wollomombi River, a tributary to the Macleay, and plastic rubbish that has been brought onto his property in poor quality mulch.

Pg 12 of HR's 2011 Annual Report refers to a "detailed schedule of works" with the hope of commencing rehabilitation work from Spring 2011, taking approximately 2 years to complete.

http://www.hillgroveresources.com.au/media/1/98/Hillgrove_AR2011.pdf

In an attempt to rehabilitate the site, contractors brought in truckloads of mulch, the idea being that the mulch would encourage pasture growth, stabilising exposed minerals in the soil, improving water retention and enabling the land to be used for agriculture, specifically grazing beef cattle. The reality was that the mulch had high levels of plastic rubbish in it, which has spread over the property, and is blown into the nearby waterway. When Wayne voiced his concerns, the rubbish kept arriving, leading him to denying the contractors access to the site in May 2015.



Plastic rubbish



More plastic rubbish



Middle and lower dams located off the lease

Water from the mine lease is collected in a series of three dams, the top dam is on the site of the lease, the middle and lower dams are off the lease. At the North Eastern edge of the lease is an open shaft, that carries water from underground shafts and overflows into the middle dam, which overflows into the lower dam, and there are indications that in wet conditions, the lower dam spills over into open paddocks. There are also indications (tide marks) that suggest that the lower dam is leaking. If this is the case, the underground water is entering the nearby waterway. Water testing suggests high levels of acidity and the presence of lead in the dams.



Middle and Lower Dams



Shaft at the NE edge of the lease



Run off from shaft to middle dam



Tide lines suggest dam leakage



Indications of runoff in wet seasons

Wayne acknowledges that some attempts have been made by the rehabilitation contractor to improve the effectiveness of the dams; however, as with the ground stabilisation strategies, he believes the work completed is far from adequate. Meat & Livestock Australia informed him he cannot sell meat from this land, denying him the opportunity to develop his pastoral property and generate an income.

SOMR representatives visited Wayne's property on 5th Feb, to get a clearer picture of the issues. The issue was brought to SOMR's attention because of its potential to impact on the Macleay Catchment via the Wollomombi River. There is a need for further information – obtaining a copy of the mine lease and the remediation plan - as a starting point.

We all use the products of mining - cars, computers and phones. We trust that governments and mining companies will work in good faith to use “best practice” extraction, processing and rehabilitation strategies. Ultimately we depend on the health of land and water to survive and to thrive. If the system doesn't work, then the threat is significant.

As Wayne asks of the miners, “What do they owe the land?”

