

Save Our Macleay River Inc

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SOMR update January 2024

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Oven Mountain Pumped Hydro

Project Acquisition by Alinta

While the Oven Mountain Pumped Hydro EIS is still on exhibition and - as far as we know - the necessary ministerial determination has not been forthcoming, Alinta Energy announced the project acquisition from OMPS Pty Ltd.

The Project DA/EIS is in the 'Assessment' stage by Dept of Planning & Environment (DPE). The Assessment process includes; submissions going to OMPHS / now Alinta for a response, along with any concerns DPE may have had too. These come back to DPE for 'Determination'.

Previously, OMPS P/L, the company developing the project to this point, was in a project partnership with Alinta Energy, a company described as "a significant Australian energy generator, retailer, wholesaler, investor, and developer." As SOMR has reported previously, Alinta Energy is owned by Hong Kong based Chow Tai Fook Enterprises (CTFE). Further details about the owners of Alinta Energy can be found on the internet.

Publication of Submissions

In December NSW Government published the submissions on the Planning Portal <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/oven-mountain-pumped-hydro-energy-storage>

During the early part of the EIS exhibition period, documents could not be accessed or downloaded. During the last days the website could not be accessed at all. A few days extension were not really helpful. It has to be noted that the exhibition process and submission lodgement procedures were badly handled by the DPE.

There are 16 items of Agency Advice, such as from Rural Fire Services, Water NSW, Fisheries, Transport for NSW, Heritage NSW; most of them asking for further information and/or outlining conditions.

There are 76 submissions from the public - 48 objections, 20 supports and 8 comments. Several of the submissions labelled as "support" or "comments" also raise concerns and request further details.

Nearly all of the considered submissions, and several experts since exhibition, have requested further research, information and proposed resolution of important aspects of the Project's DA & EIS, before being able to fully assess the project's impacts for Decline, Approval or Conditions. At present; Alinta is to formulate responses.

SOMR will write to the DPE Planning Project Officer asking when Alinta's responses will be posted on the Portal.

SOMR will also contact both State and Federal local Members, Michael Kemp and Pat Conaghan, asking why they have changed their stance. In the past they stated they would not support a Chinese owned project, but now seem to support it.

Hillgrove Mine

In December 2023 Larvotto reported that the acquisition of Hillgrove Gold-Antimony Project in NSW has been completed, following a successful Placement and Entitlement Offer of \$7.6M and a non-cash consideration of \$2.5M from Trafigura Pty Ltd.

Larvotto reported: "Apart from high-grade gold, Hillgrove has Australia's largest and a global Top 10 resource of antimony, a critical mineral for multiple countries including United States and Australia".

By 15 January they had already completed testing the contents of Tailings Storage Facility (TSF)¹, containing 1.4-million-ton of historic tailings close to the escarpment, and found that levels of gold, antimony and tungsten are sufficient to viably re-process. The Managing Director Ron Heeks commented that "Larvotto has the potential to treat these tailings independently or combined with future underground feed to the processing plant onsite."

SOMR will write a letter of introduction to new Managing Director, to regain the rapport shared with prior owners and ensure environmental protection and remediation works continue under the new management.

Upper catchment - New England and Armidale Regional Council area

Several local groups in the Armidale/Guyra area are monitoring water flow and quality in the upper Macleay catchment. They have raised concerns about increasing water use due to large housing developments (and the environmentally insensitive placement of some of these) and the expansion of hydroponic industries. The continuation of logging in the Styx State Forest and clearing required by new transmission lines for New England Renewable Energy Zone are also impacting on the waterways.

As previously reported, to ensure water security for the communities of Armidale and Guyra, Armidale Regional Council (ARC) secured \$27 million State Government funding to raise Malpas Dam wall by 6.5 metres and purchased the Oaky River Dam with an historic, now defunct power station for \$4.5 million (repairs to the Oaky site and 50 km pipeline to Armidale will add another \$108-\$116m). ARC described the Oaky River as an 'untapped water resource' and intends to build a pipeline to Armidale, accessing up to 25 megalitres per day.

The plans to grow the Armidale area with 4,000 new jobs and "future-proof" the water

supply, will reduce the flow of the Macleay more and more.

The water intensive tomato growing agri business near Guyra was recently purchased by an American consortium led by Paine Schwartz Partners.

Gravel extraction at Turners Flat

Two extraction sites, scaled up from the approved, are located in an existing active gravel flood-channel of the Macleay River at Turners Flat.

Every time the river rises, the channels created by the gravel extraction cause an increasing retreating nick-point and bank erosion on neighbouring properties.

The Development Approvals for the quarries were issued by Council in 1997.

A SOMR post from April 2022 describes the effects on the river in detail.

(<https://saveourmacleayriver.com/page/3/>)

In a letter to Dept Planning Industry & Environment SOMR asked when the 'historic' DA and Controlled Activity Approvals and Licensing can be brought up to current standards and was advised that the Turners Flat operators are required to re-apply for 'continuation of their Controlled Activity Approval operating conditions' in early 2025.

SOMR Information Forum March 2024

Under the heading "Macleay River Water Quality - SCU-SOMR citizen science project" SOMR and Prof Johnson of Southern Cross University (SCU) propose a Community Forum to take place in Bellbrook in March 2024 to relay the findings of water testing.

SOMR members have collected Macleay River water samples at Bellbrook for some 7 years, which have been analysed by Prof Scott Johnson at SCU in Lismore to understand Arsenic and Antimony mobility in the catchment. With base-line data before the 2019 bushfires and 2021-2022 floods, impacts and changes can be measured. This work has become a significant leading project in the field, nationally and globally.

Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers

A world wide movement is recognising the Rights of Nature in law, acknowledging that all life on Earth, all life supporting ecosystems, have a right to exist, thrive and evolve. That means that natural features and systems can be recognised as a legal entity. For a river, such fundamental rights give the right to flow, the right to be free from pollution, and even the right to take legal action.

In New Zealand, several ecosystems now have legal rights, including the Whanganui River and the Urewera Forest.

SOMR is considering how we can start the process of the Macleay being declared a "legal living entity". For more information go to the international organisation Rights of Rivers <https://www.rightsofrivers.org/> and the Australian Earth Laws Centre <https://www.earthlaws.org.au/>

We are taking the first steps of a long process with much opportunity for education and debates.