

Submission from the Majors Creek Community Liaison Committee.

The group of Majors Creek residents represented by this committee expresses a wide variety of opinions regarding the mine proposal from vehemently against it, to passionately in favour. This committee has worked hard to reflect that wide variety of opinion. This submission is our best attempt to do so.

The committee would like it noted that;

- This committee is neither for nor against the mine- it exists to help protect the best interests of Majors Creek and its inhabitants and to give voice to their concerns
- We do not speak for all the members of the Majors Creek Community, only those who attended our public meetings, spoke to us privately and undertook our surveys
- We are very happy with the willingness of Cortona/ Big Island to engage with the community in general and this committee and group in particular
- That if anyone builds a gold mine in Majors Creek it should be Cortona/ Big Island as they appear to have the right attitude and seem to be trying to address the concerns of the community
- That Cortona management have already addressed a great many of the community's concerns
- That the establishment of a mine here would bring quite substantial benefits to the community but these would be tempered by negative impacts
- That Cortona has already expressed an interest in establishing a community development "fund" to assist in community initiated improvement programs obviously to compensate and balance the negative aspects of the proposed mine
- The last thirty days is not a sufficient time for non experts to properly assess and reply to an Environmental Assessment document of the size and complexity of this one
- That Australia holds the world's record for destruction of species
- That Australia is amongst the world's leaders in habitat destruction
- That the area of Majors Creek is strikingly beautiful but also substantially damaged by the historic mining which has occurred over the last century and a half. It needs protection.

The overall view emanating from all the community meetings, the survey, the questions asked of Cortona and the responses to the answers, as well as the discussions held with the Environmental Defenders Office and from all the committee meetings is one of "hesitant, guarded support" for the mine but that there are a number of perceived weaknesses in the EA and a number of very significant concerns expressed even from quite strong supporters of the mine.

Very few people spoke about, or indicated, absolute opposition to the mine. What was expressed constantly was a serious concern about the number of "unknowns", or "inadequately explained" items associated with the development. They are listed below.

- **The most serious concern is the issue of water.** There is an understanding that the massive water usage is for the duration of the mine and that it will “come back” afterwards. The concern is what will happen to all aspects of the environment while the water table is lowered. This is not just about some bores dropping in level: there is a wide concern about the survival of plants whose roots might dry out and native animals whose water supply will dry up. We understand that water levels in Majors Creek will be maintained by augmentation from other water supplies but the community is most concerned about the lack of ground water no longer passing through the environment. There is a substantial concern that the EA has not thoroughly investigated this issue in a large enough area.

There is concern about the stated heavy reliance on water harvesting rights to fill a series of yet to be built dams to replace the water in Majors Creek and the inconsistency of rain. The general belief is that Cortona can “*build as many dams as it likes but they won’t fill if it don’t rain! Then what will they do?*”

We believe what is needed is a much larger study over a much larger area over a longer time, including downstream into the Araluen Valley to include the habitats of two endangered species and a much larger radius around the mine site. This should be done by an independent body.

We request that the appropriate Federal Authorities be contacted about these rare species- the *Newholland Mouse* and the plant, the *Araluen Zieria* and the possible threat to their habitat.

We request more thorough and widespread monitoring of water impact and stronger powers for appropriate agencies to shut the operation if there is a measurable negative impact on the environment such as dieback of trees and grasses and observable migration of animals.

Efficient independent monitoring processes must be put in place and if there is any evidence of dieback, the company must take immediate remediation measures to save the trees, shrubs and grasses. It is noted that Cortona, wisely, chose to relocate the planned mine entrance to not knock down trees. What if the habitat trees die through lack of water?

- **Another significant issue for the community is noise.** A person can choose to not look at something but one can not choose to not hear something. There seems to be general acceptance that during daylight hours, noise is inevitable and that there is already noise in the village and that industrial sounds coming from the mine would have little impact on that. The issue arises with industrial type noise between 6pm and 6am. Because of the unknown (and poorly explored in the EA) factor of how much noise will be generated at night the overriding attitude from the community is that the mine should not operate over 24 hours as is proposed. The EA explores the issue of noise but only deals with “acceptable’ maximum levels at certain distances but the community concern is not an issue of how much noise is “legally allowed”. Many nights are absolutely silent in this village. Any noise at all is anathema to the ambience of the night experience. So in that sense no (ongoing industrial) noise is acceptable at night. The committee is aware of the absolute necessity for the mine to operate over the 24 hour period for

“technical reasons”. But it is not really the 24 hour operation that is the issue, only the noise emanating from the mine site into the village. If the operation can go ahead with no noise, the 24 hours / 7 days a week idea is not a problem on the grounds of noise at least.

There is general concern for the interests of the closest neighbours to the mine and the impact the noise will have on their lives, and the value of their properties.

There is a general concern about the substantial noise that will be generated during the set up stage- major earthwork machinery as well as (community anticipated) surface and near surface explosions.

Activities will need to be restricted at night so NO industrial noise emanates from the mine site. Included in the final licence should be a process of monitoring and community reporting to be in place so if noise is heard by the community those activities will need to stop forthwith.

No one is allowed to create noise which disturbs other- that should include a mine next door to a village.

- **Traffic generation and the Majors Creek Road** are ongoing issues of concern not yet resolved by either the EA, statements from Cortona or the agreement recently made between Cortona and Palerang Council. Cortona has stated there are only a “few” truck movements per day from and to the mine and that hours of departure and arrival will be timed to not coincide with work and school journey times for the community. The MCCLC notes and appreciates this however the community is concerned that this may well be a serious underestimation of vehicle movements. They believe there will be a great many light vehicle movements to and from the mine as well as a plethora of small and medium service vehicles. This will be particularly noticeable during the mine development stage over the next year or two as large machinery comes and goes and then at changes of shift and times of deliveries. Company policies need to be in place that somehow control the movement of transport servicing the mine but not owned or operated by Cortona.
- **Potential for ground movement is still a concern.** There are a number of home owners in the village who own quite old homes with brick or stone walls and foundations. Everyone who attended our meetings agreed that explosions at the mine should not be allowed to cause damage to these lovely old homes. If vibrations do occur and cause damage as a result of mine activities some system of compensation and/ or repair needs to be established before the explosions start. **Insufficient study** seems to have been made about the fault lines in the area and the likelihood of these events occurring. No system of monitoring is yet in place to record or measure if these events occur. This committee has, on several occasions, warned those residents with concerns they should contact Cortona and photograph their properties in case they need “proof” of movement/ damage. The committee believes the licence could mandate this.

- The last meeting of the group which followed the joint announcement between Cortona and Palerang about the road reiterated their concern about the proposed intersection. Everyone agrees that an acceleration lane is required from the mine entrance to the north not just a simple T- intersection. Several times people mentioned the need to establish passing places. They are also suspicious that the amount of money agreed to will not be sufficient to make the road safe and that more ideas need to be explored about road sharing and safety, particularly at dawn and dusk and in fog.
- There is a concern that while the EA is a very substantial series of documents it is still lacking in important detail and fails to explore ideas of transparent and public monitoring and reporting systems for the issues of water, dust, native species issues, noise and traffic. The EA contractors, for instance, failed to identify a number of properties closely affected by the proposal- they did not ask the council about buildings approved but not yet built with straight line views to the mine site, they failed to note a property 4000 metres to the east that's been there thirty or forty years. What other unknown things were not done by the EA scientists? How do people complain about matters? What does happen if the mine makes too much noise, or dust, or if the trees die? What mechanisms are in place for the community to make a real difference? There is a very real concern that once the approvals are granted it will be "too late"- the community won't be able to do anything about anything. Consequently, we believe a process for community concerns to be addressed needs to be established for this to occur.
- There is also an underlying concern that a development such as this and the EA which tries to explore its impact is also dealing with undefinable and unmeasurable concepts- beauty, ambiance, history, silence, the night sky, sharing the planet with other species, the spirit of community. This committee thinks Cortona management is trying to deal with these ideas but the lip service paid to them by the "specialists" who wrote the EA does not do them justice.
- There continues to be a concern about the values of properties in the area. Most people came here to live the quiet life in a quaint, little former gold mining village- they did not come to live in a mining town. Some ratepayers are already planning to sell. Buyers may be difficult to find. Again this is one of those "unknowns". For all we know, if there is an influx of people this may increase prices by putting pressure on existing dwellings. The limited availability of rented accommodation has been noted at several meetings. There may even be a building boom. These are also issues not necessarily welcomed by the whole community. There is no doubt that the mine proposal has divided the community and that the ongoing existence of the mine will probably extend those ill feelings.

In summary, while there is no adamant anti- mine feeling generally in the community, there are some people who simply want it to go away. In the main there is a general sense of inevitability and guarded acceptance. However, even those who express very

strong support for the mine still articulate some misgivings. This committee is hopeful that the planning authorities do set in place very strict guidelines to keep all the activities associated with the Dargues Reef venture, and any subsequent development nearby, from negatively affecting the village and surrounding environment of Majors Creek on the issues outlined above as well as the other strongly felt issues raised in other submissions.

Finally the committee would like to thank Peter van der Borgh from Cortona for doing his best to keep the community informed and his willingness to maintain an open and candid dialogue with this committee. He has done far more than he has to. The committee has no doubt that he has the best of intentions.

On behalf of Majors Creek Community Liaison Committee

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