

What are the impacts on the environment, community and economy if the massive expansion of Rocla Materials PTY LTD's Calga Sand Quarry is allowed to go ahead.

Of all the issues on the central coast, there is none more pressing than water. Our past land management and urban development practices have severely impacted on the land's capacity to absorb and then store water in the landscape. Many of our springs and streams have already dried up, impacting severely on wetland and wet forest communities.

It was recorded by the first settlers that the central Coast region was around 60% wet plant communities, today we have less than 1%.

Once moisture is lost from the top soil through the lowering of the ground table there begins a transition in plant communities and a loss of biodiversity of both flora and fauna. Rainforests, wet forests and wetlands disappear while dry forests, woodlands and Heath scrub expand their territories.

The loss of ground tables and the drying up of the landscape has far reaching effects, not only on the environment but also on the community and economy. As dry plants spread and dominate, fire rages out of control. As top soils dry out farmlands experience severe losses in fertility and productivity. The disappearance of wet plant community and the drying up of wetlands, streams and waterfalls impacts dramatically on eco-tourism. Water shortages leading to water restrictions affect both businesses and community.

A reliable, cheap and long-term source of water is a fundamental requirement for developing and maintaining all industries.

The development of this massive expansion of Rocla's Calga sand mine will have huge impacts on our already severely degraded water systems. Their source of sand is in fact our high sandstone aquifers that exist as part of the rock formations that have formed our ridges and high country.

These layers of rock are soft and porous, allowing surface water to infiltrate easily and remain stored within the high ground of the landscape. Unfortunately this also makes Aquifer rock a target for sand mining as this type of stone is easily quarried and crushed to produce good quality sand.

When rain falls on the Plateau, much of the water infiltrates the sandstone aquifer and remains stored in the high ground. It is from these ridge top reservoirs that water trickles down to feed the rest of the environment allowing the landscape to remain moist even during extended dry periods. Plateau ground tables rely on this store of water to keep them topped up and from here does water leak from the landscape as springs, creating our hanging swamps and keeping our streams, rivers and wetlands full and flowing.

Rocla Materials PTY LTD plan to excavate vast sections of Aquifer rock, to produce a million tonnes of sand per year, as part of their mine expansion at Calga and somehow claim their actions will have minimal impact on our water and biodiversity. My professional opinion is that if this is allowed to occur the impacts will be massive and long term while the benefits to the Central Coast Community are minimal and short term.

There are many sources of sand that when extracted have far less impact on the environment, community and economy than is the case when you remove our high sandstone aquifers.

It's time we all started thinking long-term and demand our leaders to consider future generations when making economic decisions that impact on both community and environment. The approval of this mine will see more regular and severe fire storm activity, as well as further suffering for our farmers, the tourism industry, the community and our landscape.

Short term economic gain over long-term sustainability can only lead us to disaster. Now is the time for the community to unite and stand as one. If representative democracy has failed us then our only way forward is to become participants in the decision making process, through Peaceful Direct Action.

Ian Sutton

