

BHP seek 50-year mining rights to expand Olympic Dam, as SA Labor Ministers indulge a farcical process and ignore public input:

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BHP and the State Government have agreed on a Roxby Downs Bill and new Indenture to govern Olympic Dam and associated mining expansions for the next 50 years. This is a re-run of precedence to big mining vested interests that has typified SA from back in 1982 and sets in train up to a tripling of BHP demand for water in the driest State.

State Labor decided to drop the highly complex Bill and new Indenture into Parliament without prior notice, with the [Minister for Mining Hon Tom Koutsantonis MP](#) saying he wants the Bill passed 'unchanged and without delay'.

A short Select Committee was started up and "Parliamentary News" announced a six-working day public consultation period – apologies to many interested parties if they didn't get this news in a timely way from such a well-read source.

For independent scrutiny, the proponent of the Bill the Minister for Mining was made the Committee Chairperson and two non-public Hearings were held: first with the Department for Mining and then with BHP and the Chamber of Mines as supportive compliant Witnesses.

To epitomise what a *farce* this process is, the Select Committee was set up to Report the day after public input was to close at COB on Monday 1st June, and that is what they did. The 'Report' was Tabled and the Chairperson and Members of Committee all gave uncritical Speeches on the Bill on the 2nd of June - the very morning after public input had closed.

This farce contradicts any claim by our SA State Labor Government to due process, to a fair hearing and to integrity in public consultation.

The Report and Speeches inexplicably failed to discuss any of the important content of public input across 22 Submissions received - they had left no time to even consider it properly. The 'Report' has a couple of pages on the non-public Hearings but provides no discussion or even a summary of the public input. The public Submissions were not released until after the Speeches and Parliamentary week had concluded.

People have a right to be heard in SA. Aboriginal Native title representative bodies and individuals have sought to be heard on the Roxby Bill - including to give evidence in public Hearings, as the Bill affects their rights and interests and their country and culture. However, they have so far been denied that right and respect.

To be fair, the Department for Environment and Water was a Witness at second non-public Hearing: with the CEO stating that closure of BHP Olympic Dam Wellfield A "will produce significant benefits" to the unique and fragile Mound Springs that are dependent on natural flows of Great Artesian Basin (GAB) ground water. However, the Bill intends to keep Wellfield A operating for a further decade till 2036.

Asked about the benefits of replacing BHP's far larger scale Wellfield B extraction of GAB water for mining with an alternative desalinated marine water supply, the CEO said: "Yes definitely, both the environment and cultural values". However, the Bill grants rights to BHP to keep pumping water from Wellfield B for decades.

A 'Key Ask' to the Premier by the State peak body Conservation SA (19 Dec) was conveyed to the Roxby Committee in [David Noonan](#) and [Friends of Mound Springs](#) (see [FOMS](#)) public input:

Protect the Mound Springs and End Unsustainable Water Extraction from the Great Artesian Basin

Mound Springs are globally significant cultural, ecological and geological features, and are a listed EPBC Act "Endangered Ecological Community". These unique and fragile little gems support rare species, deep cultural heritage and landscapes central to the identity of Traditional Owners. Community concern has escalated regarding BHP's use of Great Artesian Basin water for mining and the cumulative impact on Springs.

We call for:

- a. Recognition of the Mound Springs of the GAB as a high-value ecosystem requiring elevated protection.*
- b. Closure as soon as possible of BHP Wellfield A water extraction operations that have directly impacted the Springs.*
- c. Transition of industrial scale BHP Wellfield B water extraction operations toward alternative water sources, such as desalination or recycled water, to protect the Basin.*
- d. Transparent timely reporting of extraction volumes, groundwater pressures and spring health and monitoring information.*
- e. Co-governance with Traditional Owners, with investment in cultural heritage protection and Indigenous Rangers on country.*

Conservation SA has sought "a clear safeguard against irreversible damage" in needed closure of Wellfield A and a phase out Wellfield B, but this Bill fails to do so.

[Deputy Premier the Hon Kyam Maher MLC](#) spoke glowingly to the Bill in a Legislative Council 2nd Reading Speech on 3rd June. Surely, he would have first read the public input from Aboriginal Native Title bodies, objections from the State Local Voice, and others calling to be heard on the Bill. As Min for Aboriginal Affairs Mr Maher must hold this Bill off and respect and deliver on the right to be heard in Public Hearings (e-mail at AttorneyGeneral@sa.gov.au Ph: (08) 7322 7050).

As Treasurer the Hon Tom Koutsantonis MP has finally put monies in the SA Budget for 'Truth-Telling' – this bad Roxby Bill and draconian new Indenture means there is a lot more truth to tell.

Integrity in public office depends a lot on what the State Labor does next on the Roxby Downs Bill and new Indenture. This bad Bill must not be rushed unchanged through Parliament by the end of this June sitting. Public Hearings are necessary so people can be heard and respected in our society and precious water and Springs must now be protected in this the driest State.

Further info, see "[Roxby Bill rides roughshod over environmental and Indigenous concerns](#)"

at https://www.conservationsa.org.au/protect_mound_springs

Public Submissions to the Roxby Downs Select Committee were belatedly released, see at:

parliament.sa.gov.au/en/Committees/Committees-Detail and scroll to:

Roxby Downs (Indenture Ratification) (Amendment of Ratification) Amendment Bill SELECT