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PROTEST STOPS COAL MINERS CLEARING ENDANGERED BUSHLAND

A peaceful protestor has today attached herself to a bull-dozer being used to clear endangered bushland for an open-cut coal mine in Leard State Forest, near Narrabri in north-western NSW.

Carmel Flint from the Northern Inland Council for the Environment attached herself to the machine at dawn this morning.

Leard State Forest is a public forest that has been earmarked for three enormous open-cut coal mines which are soon to be determined by the NSW and Federal Governments.

The three mines, two of which have already commenced and are now seeking to expand, will clear over 5,000 hectares and destroy the largest remnant of bushland left on the Liverpool Plains.

"This protest highlights the glaring failures of environmental protection legislation and the NSW Government Strategic Regional Land Use Plan" said Phil Spark, farmer and spokesperson with the Northern Inland Council for the Environment.

"Last month the NSW Government mapped Leard State Forest as a Tier 1 Biodiversity Area that could not sustain any further losses, and yet the plan failed to protect it. Today you can see it is being cleared for an open-cut coal mine.

"This exposes the Land Use Plan as a sham that does nothing to protect our most important natural assets.

"It is a national disgrace that miners are free to slash and burn critically endangered vegetation like the Grassy White Box ecosystem that is being bulldozed here today.

"If this endangered forest were located on adjoining farmland there would be strict rules preventing farmers from clearing it, but the coal miners are a law unto themselves.

"From the top of the coal chain all the way down to the port of Newcastle, coal mines are destroying our farmland, our bushland, and our way of life and putting the health of our communities at risk.

"In this case, an irreplaceable public forest is effectively being privatised by stealth for the benefit of coal billionaires like Nathan Tinkler and 100% foreign-owned companies like Idemitsu.

"We are calling on both state and federal governments to reject the coal mines planned for Leard State Forest and to instead maintain this public forest for the enjoyment of the people of NSW" he said.

Photos and video footage will be made available on request

Information or comment: Phil Spark 0427 642245

Carmel Flint may be contactable on 0419 238 915

PAC GIVES TINKLER THE GREEN LIGHT FOR 'ILLOGICAL' MINE

The Planning Assessment Commission has recommended approval for the Maules Ck coal mine, the second open-cut proposal in the Leard State Forest, despite the Minister for Planning describing the proposal as 'illogical' at the public forum on Land Use Plans in Gunnedah on Tuesday.

"This is an appalling decision by the Planning Assessment Commission and it spells disaster for Leard State Forest and neighbouring landholders around Maules Ck" said Carmel Flint, spokesperson for the Northern Inland Council for the Environment.

"This decision exposes the draft Land Use Plans released by the NSW Government for what they are - toothless documents that do nothing to protect the environment or communities.

"The Plan maps Leard State Forest as a Tier 1 biodiversity area that cannot sustain any further significant loss but the Planning Assessment Commission has agreed to that forest being destroyed.

"Even the Minister had to acknowledge at the Gunnedah public forum on Tuesday that the proposed mine was 'illogical', but the Planning Assessment has ignored logic to rubber stamp this mine.

"The mining industry is rolling like a juggernaut over our landscapes and our communities. Nothing is sacred - not even a nationally endangered ecosystem in prime condition is enough to put the brakes on this industry.

"The recommendations by the Planning Assessment Commission today take us one giant step closer to becoming the next Hunter Valley.

"The entrenched health problems, the fouling of water and air, the disruption of communities and the destruction of the environment are all set to be replicated now in the Gunnedah Basin.

"Just this year in the north-west we've already seen miners fined for sloppy practices, polluted water discharged into creek systems, and coal dust appearing on rooves in Narrabri.

"We are still waiting to hear the results of an investigation which commenced in January into donations made by Nathan Tinkler to the National Party that were not disclosed when his Aston Resources Maules Ck mine application was submitted.

Photos: Recent aerial photos from the Boggabri mine show current clearing of endangered ecological communities and water filling open-cut pits after rain.

More information or comment: Carmel Flint on 0400 521474