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MERGER SHOULD RECONSIDER LEARD FOREST COAL MINES

Environment groups have called on the newly merged Whitehaven/Aston Resources company to reconsider its plans for open-cut mining in Leard State Forest, saying that the mines will have irreversible impacts on the environment and community.

The shareholders of the two companies voted yesterday to go ahead with the merger which was proposed last year.

An adjoining mine, Boggabri Coal Mine, was the subject of a protest last week against clearing of an endangered ecological community in Leard State Forest.

The Northern Inland Council for the Environment has released a Google Earth image (attached) of the Boggabri and Tarrawonga coal mines which reveals the enormous environmental damage that has already been incurred.

"We are calling on the newly merged Whitehaven/Aston resources company to reconsider its involvement in two coal mines that will destroy an irreplaceable public resource in Leard State Forest" said Phil Spark, farmer and spokesperson for the Northern Inland Council for the Environment.

"The current and proposed open-cut coal mines in Leard State Forest do not have the support of the local community and we are calling for the company to withdraw from these developments.

"It is obvious that the current clearing and the open-cut coal pit being operated by Boggabri Coal Mine is causing enormous environmental damage.

"There is no way that this ecosystem can ever be replaced and there is a long history of failed mine rehabilitation in this country to support that claim.

"Statements last week by Boggabri Coal that they will produce biodiversity benefits to offset the impact of clearing almost 2,000 hectares of native vegetation are fanciful.

"One only needs to look at the Google Earth image which shows the destruction that has been wrought on this forest to know that it can never be repaired.

"The fundamental fact of the matter is that endangered communities like Grassy White Box woodland cannot be cleared by farmers, because it is recognised they can never be replaced.

"Even the NSW Government has recently mapped Leard State Forest as a Tier 1 biodiversity area that cannot sustain any further significant losses" he said.

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