

Hon Brian Ellis MLC  
Chair, Standing Committee on Environment  
and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Mr. Ellis, *Brian*

**Re: PETITION NO 143 – ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACY OF MINING IN WA**

Thank you for this opportunity to provide a written submission regarding the matters put forward in Petition No. 143, which I tabled on behalf of the Petitioners.

The matter has not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

This petition was promoted by the Conservation Council of WA, which is extremely concerned about the environmental impacts of inadequately monitored mine closures.

Numerous former and abandoned mine sites have left major pollution legacies following mine closure. As I will outline below, there is a long-standing lack of official knowledge about, and monitoring of, the after effects of mining activities in WA. My serious concern is that these issues have been raised repeatedly at Ministerial level, and yet they are still not adequately dealt with.

The 'Report on Conservation and Rehabilitation in the Gold-Mining Industry' (Playford Report) of 1985 stated in its Executive Summary that "... there are many [mining operations] that are continuing environmentally undesirable practices of the past. Large areas of the Goldfields are being disturbed, with inadequate provision for environmentally acceptable means of overburden and tailings disposal, for the filling in of abandoned workings, and for the needs of future land usage" (Playford Report, p. 1). It also stated that "... the [Mines] department has not set appropriate environmental conditions on many mining and exploration operations, and it has been unable to adequately enforce relevant provisions of the act."

The follow-up 'Conservation and Rehabilitation in the Gold Mining Industry : a report to the Hon Minister for Mines' by the Minerals Environment Liaison Committee (MELC) of 1996 stated in its Executive Summary that "Tailings storage design, construction and rehabilitation are still of particular concern with remedial action for seepage required in a number of cases. Safety and environmental issues related to old mine sites are a continuing problem."

**PUBLIC**

**PORTFOLIO AREAS:**

ENERGY & CLIMATE CHANGE; MINES AND PETROLEUM; STATE DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRY; NUCLEAR ENERGY; LOCAL GOVERNMENT;  
WASTE MANAGEMENT; PORTS; PASTORAL ISSUES; ABORIGINAL ISSUES; RACING AND GAMING; AND REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY.

POSTAL ADDRESS: PO BOX 94 WEST PERTH WA 6872 | OFFICE ADDRESS: 41 HAVELOCK STREET WEST PERTH

Fifteen years later, the Auditor General has found in Report 8 of 2011 'Ensuring compliance with conditions on mining' that "...there are weaknesses in how other social, environmental and economic conditions are monitored and enforced ...", and that "Currently, agencies can provide little assurance that the conditions are being met."

It is now time to finally address these issues by way of an open and thorough Parliamentary inquiry, so that Parliament itself can address the concern of the Auditor General that there has been inadequate advice to Parliament in this matter.

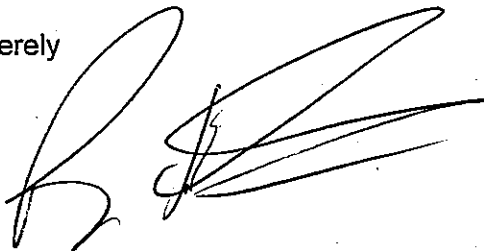
I look forward to providing detailed submissions to an inquiry, but some of the areas of significant concern include:

- Destruction of geological heritage by open pit mining
- Negative impacts on native flora and fauna
- Visual pollution
- Water pollution
- Air pollution
- Depletion of water resources
- Destruction of Aboriginal culture

There are many major specific issues associated with the legacy of mining, which include acid mine drainage (AMD) whereby the minerals in mining waste react with ambient water and oxygen, causing highly toxic AMD-polluted water; the vast quantities of hypersaline water; and the air quality issues concerning SO<sub>2</sub> and dust.

Thank you for taking these comments into account in your deliberations. Please don't hesitate to contact me should you require further information or clarification of any points.

Yours sincerely



**The Hon Robin Chapple MLC**

Member for the Mining and Pastoral Region

7 December 2011

**PUBLIC**