

# Help stop the Escarpment Mine - Denniston Plateau

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June 2011, West Coast Environment Network (WCENT)

A new coal mine proposed for the West Coast would destroy 200 hectares of a nationally significant ecosystem and increase New Zealand's coal exports by up to 62%<sup>6</sup>. The mine, located entirely on public conservation land, would be run by Buller Coal Limited (owned by Bathurst Resources Ltd Australia), which has already applied for resource consents from Buller District Council and the West Coast Regional Council<sup>1</sup>, and an access arrangement and concession from the Department of Conservation.

You can see the location of the mine footprint in the photo below, which would be turned into an open-cast pit, with a further 48 ha for a coal processing plant and related infrastructure. But make no mistake; this proposal is only the beginning. The company holds mining permits for 10,000 ha on the Buller Coalfield, with an estimated 50 million tonnes of coal. Letting this mine go ahead will set a precedent that will accelerate the destruction of this unique environment.



The Denniston and Stockton Plateaux are New Zealand's only elevated (600-1100 m above sea level) coal measure plateaux, are considered nationally significant, 'outstanding natural landscapes'<sup>2</sup> and contain 'originally rare ecosystems'<sup>3</sup>. Unlike Stockton, the Denniston Plateau is relatively intact and is the only Brunner coal measure ecosystem without large-scale land conversion. The interplay between geology, altitude, high rainfall and wind, and gentle sloping of the plateaux has created a dramatic landscape, and unique associations of native plants and animals that are different from anywhere else in New Zealand<sup>5</sup>.

## Impacts of the Escarpment mine proposal

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Even if the company's proposed mitigation measures were effectively implemented, the proposal would lead to:

- The killing or displacement of all resident wildlife (including fernbirds, Great spotted kiwi, *Powelliphanta patrickensis* (giant land snail), West Coast green and forest geckos and speckled skinks, to name a few).
- The permanent loss of 200 ha of a nationally-significant upland coal-measure ecosystem on public conservation land. The entire Denniston Plateau is identified as a 'priority site for biodiversity management'<sup>2</sup> and the sandstone erosion pavement ecosystem has been given 'high priority for protection' by Ministry for the Environment and Department of Conservation<sup>4</sup>.



A West Coast green gecko ('at risk of extinction -declining') on manuka tree, Denniston Plateau.

- The further decline and range restriction of several threatened species. Total habitat area on conservation land for North Westland snow tussock and the giant land snail *P. patrickensis* (both endemic to Buller coal plateaux) would be reduced by 6.7% and 10% respectively.
- A forecasted 28% increase in New Zealand's coal production<sup>6</sup>.
- Further loss of the originally rare ecosystems: sandstone erosion pavement and tarns.
- The public of New Zealand losing ownership of a high-value conservation area, and in return becoming liable for long-term acid mine drainage into waterways and weed control.

The Department of Conservation did not oppose the resource consent application, despite strong technical reports on the likely negative effects of the mine. It was clearly a political decision to not oppose the mine, rather than one based on the requirements of the Conservation Act.

## How you can help stop the Escarpment mine....

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- **Write a letter to the Minister of Conservation** ([kate.wilkinson@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:kate.wilkinson@parliament.govt.nz) or Freepost, Parliament Buildings, Wellington) **and the Conservator for the West Coast** ([mslater@doc.govt.nz](mailto:mslater@doc.govt.nz)) expressing your opposition and concern. A template has been provided, but it will be more powerful if you use or add some of your own wording. Let's flood Kate Wilkinson's office with opposition to this!
- **Submit in opposition to the Concession application.** This will be publicly notified, probably in August-September. West Coast ENT will provide support on preparing a submission closer to the time.
- **Keep in the loop.** If you would like to receive updates/alerts on this issue, please send an email to [wcent@riseup.net](mailto:wcent@riseup.net). We can also provide further information, if requested.

Thank you,

Lynley Hargreaves

Chairperson - West Coast Environment Network

1. <http://www.wcrc.govt.nz/escarpment/>
2. WC Conservation Management Strategy 2010-2020.
3. Williams PA, Wiser S, Clarkson B, Stanley MC 2007. New Zealand's historically rare terrestrial ecosystems set in a physical and physiognomic framework. *New Zealand Journal of Ecology* 31: 119-128.
4. MfE &DOC, 2007. Protecting our Places, Information about the Statement of National Priorities for Protecting Rare and Threatened Biodiversity on Private Land. MfE Wellington.
5. Overmars FB, Kilvington MJ, Gibson RS, Newell CL, Rhodes TJ 1998. Ngakawau Ecological District. Survey report for the Protected Natural Areas Programme. PNAP Survey Report No. 11. Department of Conservation, Hokitika.
6. Ministry for Economic Development website: [http://www.med.govt.nz/templates/MultipageDocumentTOC\\_45786.aspx](http://www.med.govt.nz/templates/MultipageDocumentTOC_45786.aspx)