2022

The Drip, Conservation and Coal Mining: A Study of Visitor Attitudes

MDEG

1/2/2022

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Executive Summary

The Drip gorge (or Great Dripping Wall) represents a beautiful, rare, and unique ecosystem reliant on groundwater. While parts of The Drip gorge are now included in Goulburn River National Park, some of the walking track has only State Conservation Area status, and the remaining land area significant for the sustenance of ground water to The Drip and Goulburn River are subject to Moolarben EL6288 (underground mining exploration license). The importance of The Drip has been recognized by the National Trust.

The value of The Drip is pronounced both culturally to the Wiradjuri Nation, and as an area of conservation and recreation enjoyed by approximately 50,000 visitors every year (National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), 2022). Its importance is noted by the prominence given to it by Mudgee Regional Tourism and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. It has been rated number one environmental attraction for local visitors to the area.

The Drip gorge represents a unique ecosystem, part of a biodiversity corridor linking the eastern fall to the western slopes; a potential climate refuge for species in the advent of climate change due to the permanent availability of water and a cooler microclimate.

The Drip gorge has been the centre of conservation efforts for many years by Mudgee District Environment Group (MDEG), the Mudgee Local Aboriginal Land Council (MLALC) and local Land-Care groups[1]. The NSW government permitted the sale conversion of the original crown lease to freehold title by Chinese Yancoal subsidiary Moolarben Coal in 2010, and there has been an ongoing struggle to obtain protection for the area since. Of particular concern has been the status and protection of groundwater adversely affected by underground coal mining. Additionally, salinity is a significant issue with the amount of salt in mine water discharged into the headwaters of the Goulburn River by Ulan Coal and Moolarben Coal mines currently estimated at greater than 12 tons per day.

Underground coal mining causes subsidence[2] and changes to the groundwater system lowering water tables, flow directions and water quality and quantity. This can adversely affect streamflow particularly during extended dry periods. Subsidence can also trigger cracking of sandstone cliff lines, due to far field geological movement's and upsidence[3] of the riverbed.

Moolarben Coal has approval for their UG4 longwall mine to come within 200 metres of the Goulburn River near The Drip picnic area and carpark, despite expert advice (Pells, 2006) suggesting mining any closer that one kilometre to the Goulburn River could potentially damage the cliffs and gorge. To ascertain community sentiment towards this situation, MDEG has conducted a study interviewing visitors to The Drip as a stakeholder group. This is comprised of members of the public as end users of this area. These people have experienced and witnessed The Drip and have no vested interests. As people with lived experience, they are able to appreciate the merit or otherwise of the area.

[1] Landcare & Environment Action Program (LEAP) 1995
[2] http://www.undergroundcoal.com.au/fundamentals/13_subsidence.aspx
[3] "Upsidence" is associated with mining subsidence and occurs where a concentration of horizontal stress may cause strata beds close to the surface to bend upwards and possibly fracture.

Visitors were interviewed and given a survey to complete. The map showing Moolarben Coal development approvals for underground mining affecting the area was also made available. Local users of The Drip were also given the opportunity to comment via a SurveyMonkey questionnaire posted on Facebook, and given as an email link. A total of 531 responses were received, 436 from interviewing visitors at The Drip over 5 days (Australia Day and 2 weekends) plus 95 comments received online between Australia Day 26 January and 13 February 2022). The majority of people interviewed at the Drip were visitors to our region.

The findings were unanimous. Visitors to the Drip made a clear, concise, and decisive response.

1. **99% of respondents stated that The Drip has significant environmental, recreational and/ or conservation value.**
2. **98% of respondents stated that The Drip should be protected by the NSW Government from the threats of underground coal mining,**
3. **98% stated that The Drip should be listed as an Asset of Intergenerational Significance for its protection, and for the use and enjoyment of future generations, and**
4. **That the conservation value of The Drip and Goulburn River outweighed the perceived benefits of underground coal mining. This included both in reference to the effects on the groundwater table (91% against mining), and reduced access to the walking track for recreational value threatened by subsidence (90% against mining).**

By their responses, visitors to the Drip also demonstrated that they are aware of the deleterious effects of underground mining on groundwater systems (88%), and due to subsidence (63%).

Positively the majority of visitors knew of and recognized the cultural importance of this area to the Wiradjuri Nation (75%). Many respondents were repeat visitors to The Drip (39%), and a significant proportion (73%) were visitors to the Mudgee region.

Recommendations

There is broad and enduring community support as evidenced by the findings of our study for the protection of the highly valued and regionally significant Drip Gorge riparian area and adjacent escarpments. This can be achieved by granting full protection of this sensitive river corridor within Goulburn River National Park. It is now widely accepted that the significant cultural, spiritual, historical, educational, tourism and recreational values associated with The Drip and the Corner Gorge should lead to their protection.

Moolarben Coal Mine currently has approval to mine closer than 200 metres from the river and 400 metres from the Corner gorge. A two-kilometre-wide buffer excluding mining from the Goulburn River in the vicinity of The Drip and Corner gorges is needed to protect the area from groundwater drawdown, loss of river flow, and subsidence.

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The visitors surveyed have shown and identified that the Government must take action to:

- Protect The Great Dripping Wall, the Goulburn River and adjacent sandstone escarpments surrounding The Drip Gorge from underground coal mining. This can be achieved by: extending the Goulburn River National Park to include the whole river corridor and groundwater catchment areas; upgrading the current Goulburn River State Conservation Area to National Park status; and withdrawing the current approval for Moolarben UG4 longwalls 8-14.
- Reverse the loss of public amenity that will result from the continuation, and further approvals of coal mining in this area. Members of the public, as visitors to this area, represent a significant stakeholder group. It is estimated by NPWS that 50,000 visitors come to this site every year. They have been inadequately consulted by the NSW Government as to their views on the conservation of this area with respect to underground coal mining.
- Recognise the conservation value of The Drip as an entire ecosystem and entity that exceeds in value the perceived benefits of underground coal mining. As evidenced by clear public sentiment.
- Increase monitoring of groundwater impacts between Moolarben Mine UG4 longwalls and the river.
- Cancel EL 6288 north of the Goulburn River.
- Recognise and protect The Drip gorge as a unique ecosystem, a biodiversity corridor, and refuge for species affected by climate change, in line with the goals of the Draft Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041.
- Designate The Drip gorge as an Asset of Intergenerational Significance as defined by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, for its ongoing protection for the benefits of generations to come (as evidenced by 98% support from visitors).

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Introduction

The Drip and Corner gorges of the Goulburn River form part of an ancient, visually dramatic landscape. Many visit this iconic and culturally significant place to experience its natural beauty and extensive Aboriginal heritage, walking along the Goulburn River or picnicking under soaring sandstone cliffs. Clear spring water drips and seeps through sculptural rock formations laden with ferns, bottle brushes and weeping grasses.

The Drip gorge sits on the western most lip of the Sydney sandstone basin and on the lowest point of the Great Dividing Range. It is only a short walk (1.4 kilometres) from the Ulan-Cassilis Road and is widely used by the community, tourists, and schools for recreational, educational, and cultural purposes. It allows families to have a 'wilderness experience' similar to walks in the Blue Mountains Heritage Area or Northern Territory gorges. It is estimated by NPWS that 50,000 people visit The Drip every year.

Background

There is a coal mining history amongst these beautiful cliffs and river gorges. Prior to the 1980s a pit and prop coal mine, still using pit ponies to haul the coal, dug small quantities to supply the local hospital. In the early 1980s Ulan Coal Mine was significantly expanded with the development of a large open cut mine followed by an underground longwall operation. This involved diverting 5.2 kilometres of the Goulburn River around the open cut pit.

The longwall mining developed in the late 1980s expanded in the 1990s to the north-west of the river, beneath the Triassic sandstone escarpments. As a result of mining the aquifer groundwater levels (SWLs) in the alluvial flats adjacent to the river were lowered by over 40 metres - from 3m BGL (Below Ground Level) to 43m BGL. Aquifer yields reduced from greater than 10L/s to less than 1L/s (Coffey-Partners-International, 1991; Middlemis and Fulton, 2011; UCML, 2015). The alluvial aquifers have never recovered and remain disconnected to the river system (Imrie, 2019).

Since 2004 two more mega coal mine developments were approved across the headwaters of the Goulburn River – Wilpinjong Coal Mine (Peabody) and in 2007 Moolarben Coal Operations (Yancoal). By 2016 the approved underground mining footprint in the Ulan Wollar area has grown to nearly 145 square kilometres with an approved total open cut area of over 68 square kilometres. The licensed extraction of water by the coal mines, including incidental take (interception) of groundwater was predicted in these mine reports to increase steadily exceeding 42 ML/day over the next 10 years. By 2020 Ulan Coal Mine reported 11,276 Million litres (30.9 ML/day) of surface and groundwater was extracted or intercepted[4] and Moolarben Coal mines reported 5,600 ML of rainfall - that is a total of 16,876 million litres or 46 ML/day (UlanCoal, 2020; MCC, 2020)

The mines discharge excess groundwater and treated saline mine water into the Goulburn River. In the period 2012-2016 approximately 12,800 tons of salt was exported downstream into the river (UCML,

[4] Includes rainfall, seepage from groundwater, coal and spoil, groundwater and water from dewatering bores and runoff/drainage from tailings.

2012; UCML, 2013; UCML, 2014; UCML, 2016). During the drier months salt deposits have been observed along reaches of the Goulburn River in the sandy riverbed and on stream banks, most likely due to evaporation and capillary action.

The chemical composition of saline mine discharge water can differ significantly to what naturally occurs in surface waters. Mine de-watering, seepage, and the discharge of excess mine water in the upper Goulburn is increasing downstream salt loads, altering the natural flow regime, and changing surface and groundwater chemistry. The relative proportion of ions in saline waters as well as other co-occurring environmental stressors (e.g. turbidity) can have a combined greater effect on ecosystem health than total salinity (Kefford *et al.*, 2013; Krogh, 2018). The impact of mine water discharge on macro-invertebrates and groundwater stygofauna requires much more research.

This situation can only be explained by inadequate oversight and lack of due diligence in environmental protection associated with the relevant NSW Government agencies responsible for protecting the river, the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) and the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). In relation to the management of water resources in the Goulburn River catchment, all three existing mines have been granted pollution licenses by the government that permit offsite discharge of treated mine water and spillage from sediment dams.

The mining history of The Drip is also marred by government mismanagement of public lands. In 2010 the NSW Government approved the conversion by Moolarben Coal (Yancoal) of the 700 hectares of Crown Land, including The Drip gorge, into Private Title for $2084. The Government was well aware of the environmental value, cultural significance and social worth of The Drip and Goulburn River Gorges to the whole community. Nonetheless, this did not prevent the transfer of remaining public ownership to Yancoal's Moolarben Coal mine without community warning or consultation[5].

[5] Iconic gorge sold to Chinese coal company for pittance, Newcastle Herald, Dec 19, 2014.https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/2776619/iconic-gorge-sold-to-chinese-coal-company-for-pittance/

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Environmental Impacts and Conservation Significance

Environmental impacts from open cut and underground mining threatens the long-term health, resilience and viability of The Drip and Goulburn River system. These include a rise in algal blooms promoted by the build-up of clay and silt in the sandy riverbed from the discharge of highly turbid water after storm events and ongoing legacy of the river diversion; significant increase in river salt loads and unexplained salinity spikes; plus the loss of groundwater base flows that maintain critical stream flows during extended dry periods are all examples of coal mining impacts that can affect this sensitive environment.

Rehabilitation of massively disturbed mined land is a slow unproven process; so far, no mined areas can be regarded as fully restored to a functional ecosystem despite nearly 40 years since the commencement of the first open cut. The long-term impact and future recovery of the groundwater levels is one of the key major issues facing the river system. Mine modelling predicts well in excess of 100 years until depleted groundwater levels may stabilise. Until then the river and dependent ecosystems have lost crucial groundwater base flows, reducing their resilience, and increasing their vulnerability to drought.

Threatened species at risk

The expansion of coal mining in this area has a significant negative impact on unique and threatened species and their habitat. The Moolarben Coal open cut and underground operations affects 226 hectares of the Critically Endangered White Box/ Yellow Box/Blakely's Red-gum Ecological Community removing threatened species habitat for woodland birds, bats, owls, and iconic native mammals.

The critical woodlands to be destroyed provide habitat for nationally listed endangered animal species including the Swift Parrot, Squirrel Glider, Painted Honeyeater, Hooded Robin, Diamond Firetail and the now Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater. Studies have also identified the occurrence of habitat for the threatened Brown Treecreeper, Speckled Warbler, Gilbert's Whistler, Glossy Black Cockatoo, Powerful Owl, Large Bentwing Bat, Large-eared Pied Bat and Greater Long- eared Bat and the Koala. Foraging and breeding sites will be lost, especially from areas where there is a high density of tree hollows.

Impacts from the Moolarben Mine Stage 2 will also be felt from the removal of several kilometres of creek habitat and significant cultural landscapes along the Murragamba Creek and Eastern Creek valleys, including two groundwater dependent ecosystems.

Cumulative impacts of coal mines

The impact of these three large and expanding mega coal mines in the Ulan Wollar area raises many questions about interference to regional groundwater and long-term viability and integrity of the Goulburn River, a major tributary of the Hunter River. The combined total surface and groundwater being intercepted or extracted by mining operations exceeds 45 million litres per day. There has been an increase in the salt load in the river and changes in the hydrochemistry and water quality from mine water discharge and seepage into the catchment.

The local community has also expressed their concerns with the risks to surface water, damage to The Drip and Corner Gorges, impacts to groundwater dependent ecosystems, fears of local tourism industry decline, dust, noise, and an overall inadequate assessment of cumulative and regional impacts associated with these three mining operations. The DPE continues to approve expansions in coal mining despite knowing the substantial risk of adverse consequences. One can only conclude from this that coal mining (and the revenue associated with it) is given a higher priority for the DPE and the NSW Government than environmental sustainability and protection.

Mine subsidence, loss of base flows and cliff stability

Underground mining within two kilometres of the river has the potential to permanently damage this ecosystem and fragile geological structure (Pells, 2006). Strata subsidence resulting from long wall mining can permanently alter groundwater storage and flow direction that provides base flow to the river. Subsidence can trigger far field movements along geological lines of weakness causing buckling of the riverbed and fracturing of cliff faces and escarpments along the river corridor.

Figure One (below) shows a Moolarben Coal Mine map of the current approved layout of longwall tunnels for the approved underground mine (UG4) on the southern side of the Goulburn River and The Drip Gorge, plus the potential location of a proposed access tunnel under the river to potentially extend mining north of the river. Of significance to note is that only a small area is actually fully protected by National Parks Gazettal (covers The Drip and corner gorge) while a section of the river corridor is covered by a State Conservation Area (SCA). An SCA permits underground mining and associated surface infrastructure. The walking track and carpark are currently under a SCA. The potential for the Moolarben Coal Mine to be extended to the north of the Drip via access tunnels under the river is still an

option. One can postulate that the National Parks Gazettal does not cover the whole river corridor and adjacent lands to allow for future mine expansion to the north of the river. Land on both sides of the river is vital to the groundwater system in the area providing groundwater to The Drip and base flow to the river the Goulburn River, both are groundwater dependent ecosystems.

Figure One *– Moolarben Coal Mine Map showing approved UG4 longwalls proximity to Goulburn River and proposed location of access tunnels under the Goulburn River to extend mining to the north.*

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Asset of Intergenerational Significance- NPWS

The NSW Bushfire Inquiry recognised the need to identify the most important natural and cultural assets in the National Park estate, so that special provision can be made for their conservation.

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* was amended to allow the Minister for the Environment to declare an area to be an Asset of Intergenerational Significance (AIS).

An Asset of Intergenerational Significance (AIS) can be any area of exceptional value – natural or cultural – that warrants special protection including dedicated management measures.

NPWS is identifying and assessing other areas in the national park system that may merit declaration and management as an environmental Asset of Intergenerational Significance (AIS). These assessments take into account the best available scientific information and new data and research about conservation values and threats that continue to emerge.

Potential declarations of environmental AIS will be informed by a range of considerations that include:

- sites for critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable species
- important areas for breeding, feeding or shelter
- locations where locally extinct mammal species are being reintroduced
- where the national park otherwise provides important habitat.

Opportunities to declare land in national parks as cultural AIS will also be examined. NPWS works with Aboriginal people, to confirm the matters that should be considered and to respect cultural sensitivities and knowledge.

These cultural assets may include lands with tangible cultural heritage of importance to Aboriginal people, such as rock art, scar trees and middens. Protection may also be provided to intangible values, such as places of spiritual importance where storylines live on in the landscape and where significant cultural activities occurred and continue to take place.

Similarly, further work is required to examine the scope to declare lands as cultural AIS because of their historic heritage values.

For each threatened species AIS, NPWS has a statutory obligation to prepare and implement a concise conservation action plan (CAP) which sets out:

- key risks to the declared area of habitat for the threatened species
- priority actions to reduce risks to this important habitat – such as dedicated feral animal control or fire management, or the establishment of insurance populations
- actions to measure and report on the health/population of the threatened species (metrics).
  Assets of Intergenerational Significance | NSW Environment, Energy and Science

To determine whether the public viewed The Drip to be worthy of AIS status, we directly asked a question in our survey.

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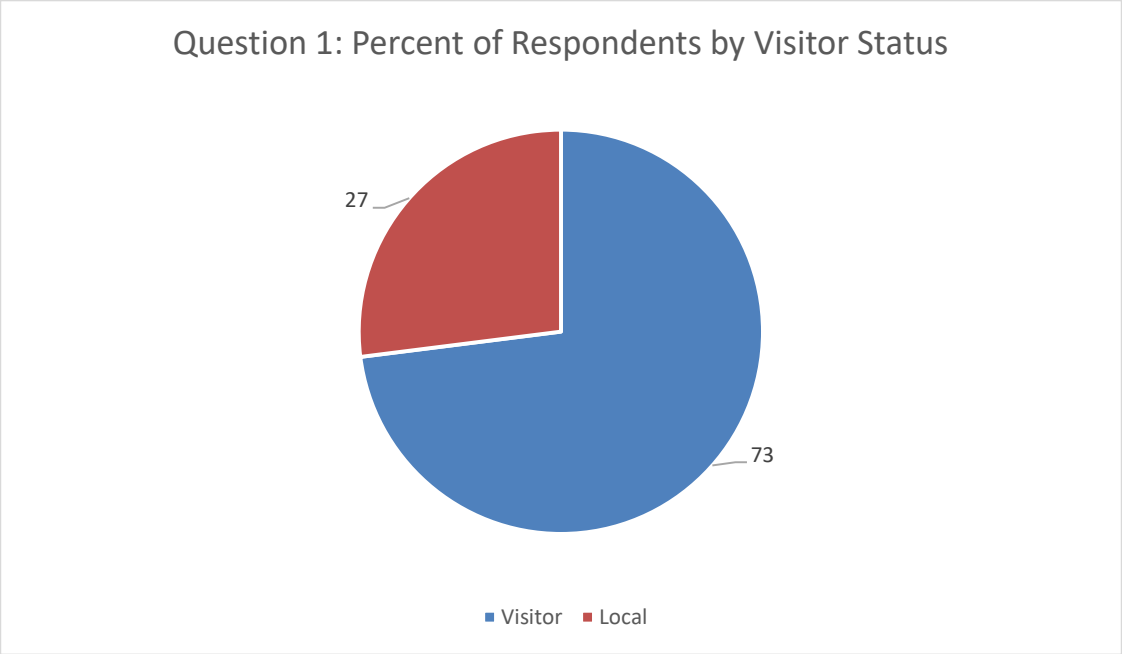
Survey Aim

It was the purpose of our study to determine what members of the public who actually visit and use The Drip Gorge and Goulburn River felt about government management of this area. These people have no vested interests. They are not employed by the mining industry, it is unlikely they have been involved in the approvals process by DPE and the EPA, and as they have been to the site, they have lived experience that enables them to conclude an importance or otherwise of the area in their informed judgement.

Results

Question 1: Are you a visitor to this region? Please include your postcode or country of residence.



Of the respondents 33 indicated that they were from a different state, 8 indicated they were from a different country.

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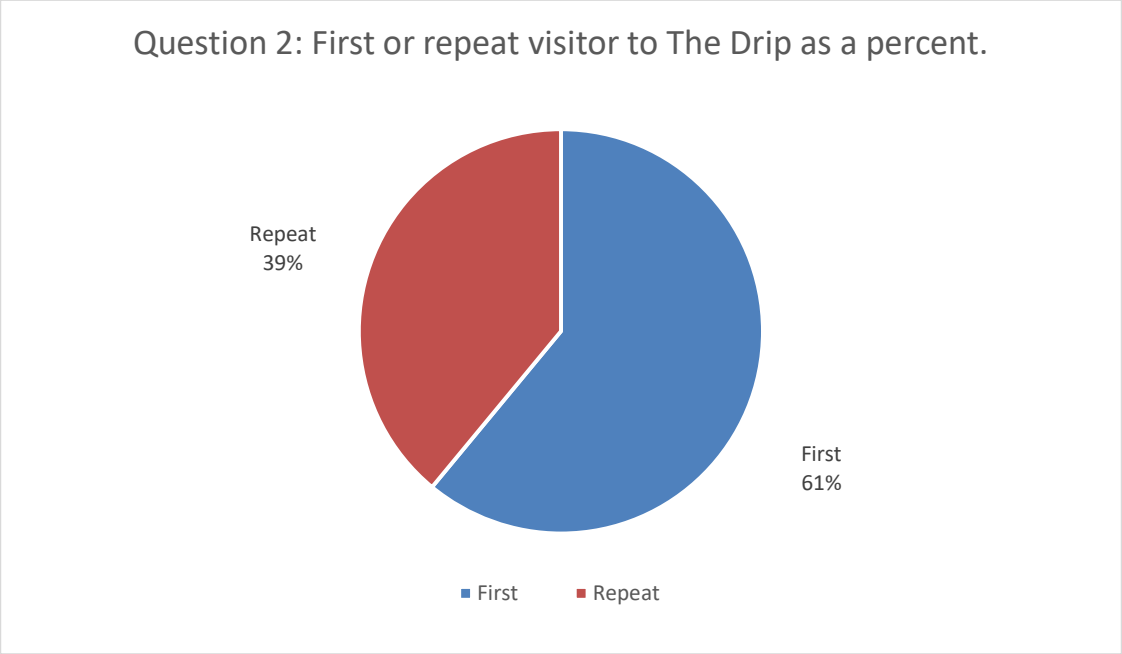
Question 2: Is this your first visit to The Drip?



60.68 % of respondents indicated it was their first visit to The Drip. 39.32% had been to the Drip on more than one occasion. This translates to 321 new visitors and 208 repeat visitors during the study.

Comments:

Once before.

Beautiful

I have been coming here for forty years.

Awesome.

Many times

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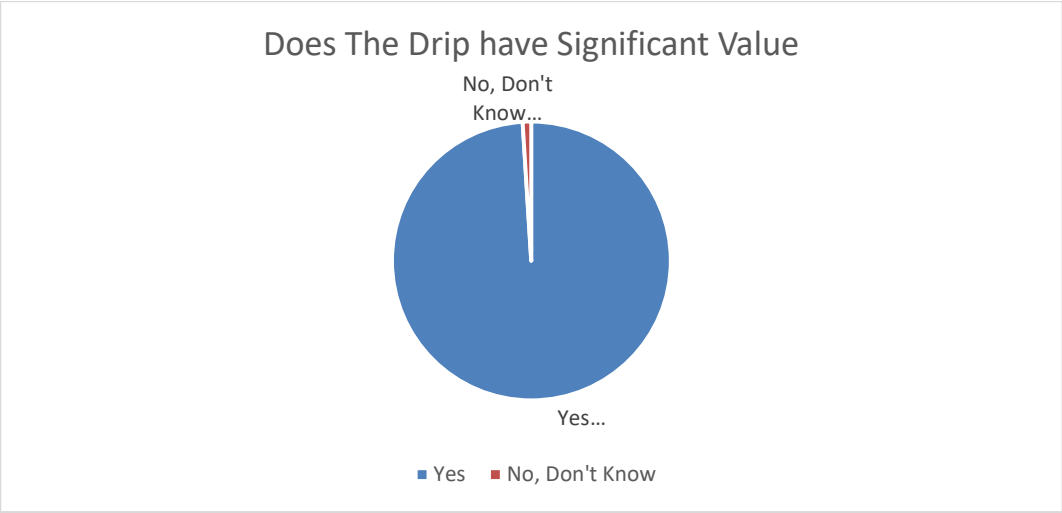
Question 3: Do you consider that The Drip Gorge has significant environmental, recreational and/or conservation value?



98.86 % of respondents stated that The Drip has significant environmental, recreational and/or conservation value. 0.95% stated no value, 0.19% did not know.

Comments:

Both, more environmental.

Most definitely.

Very much.

Absolutely.

Most certainly.

No brainer.

More bush walks needed.

Best part of the Mudgee area.

Amazing.

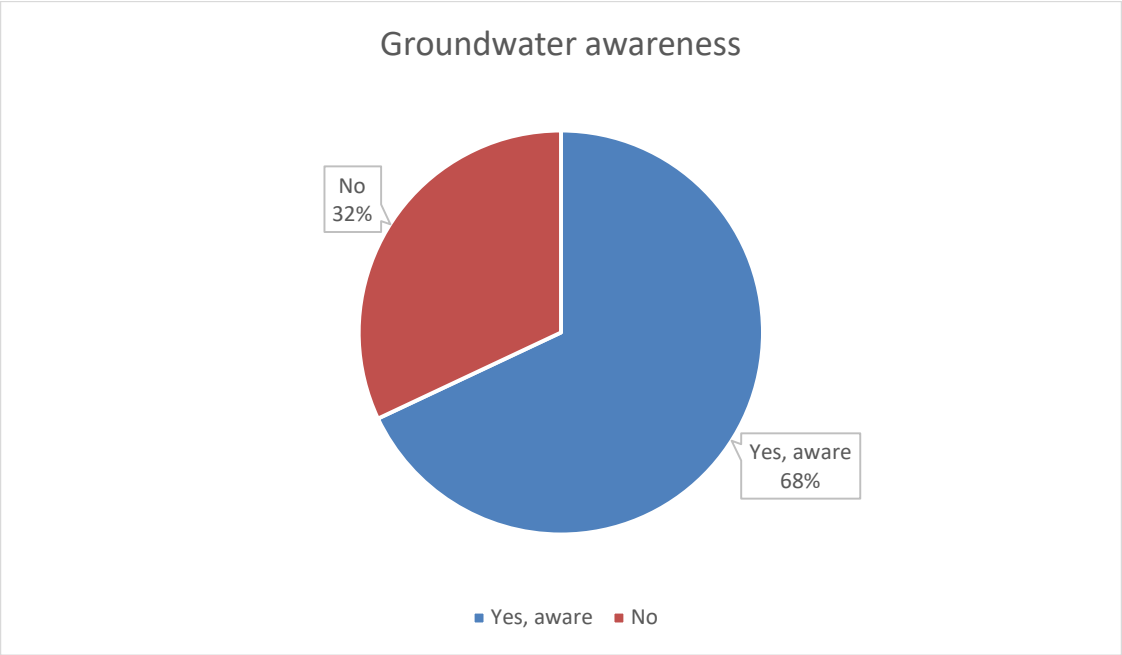
Absolutely.

Beautiful.

Yes, without a doubt.

Amazing, beautiful part of nature to be reserved.

Question 4: Are you aware that 'The Drip' and the flow in the Goulburn River rely on groundwater (also called springs and aquifers)?



The majority of visitors (68%) knew that water flow at The Drip and the Goulburn River was dependent on groundwater.

Comments:

That's really cool.

Yes-now!

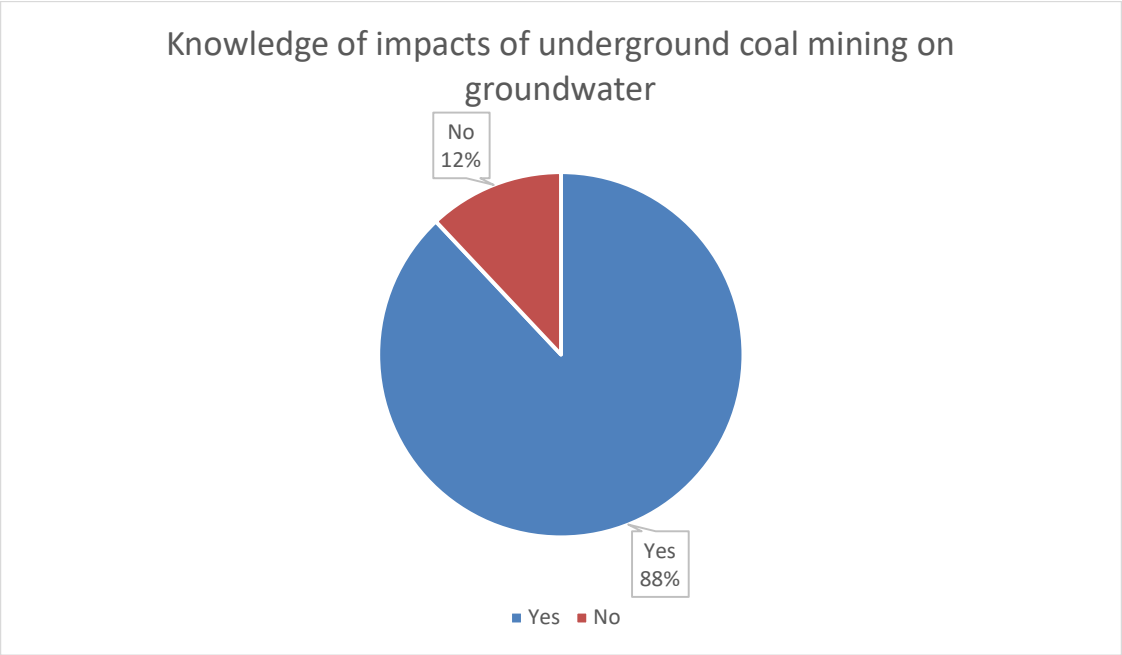
Very important then!

And is primarily fed by the mines outflow from treatment plants.

I am now.

But read all the information

Question 5: Are you aware underground coal mining can damage groundwater quality and flow?



87.55% of respondents knew of the deleterious effects of underground coal mining on groundwater. 12.45% did not. This demonstrates that the majority of visitors are clearly aware of coal mining impacts on groundwater.

Comments:

Seen it in other areas.

And has

I understand now.

Yes, stop mining.

Go away!!

I guessed it can.

Shame.

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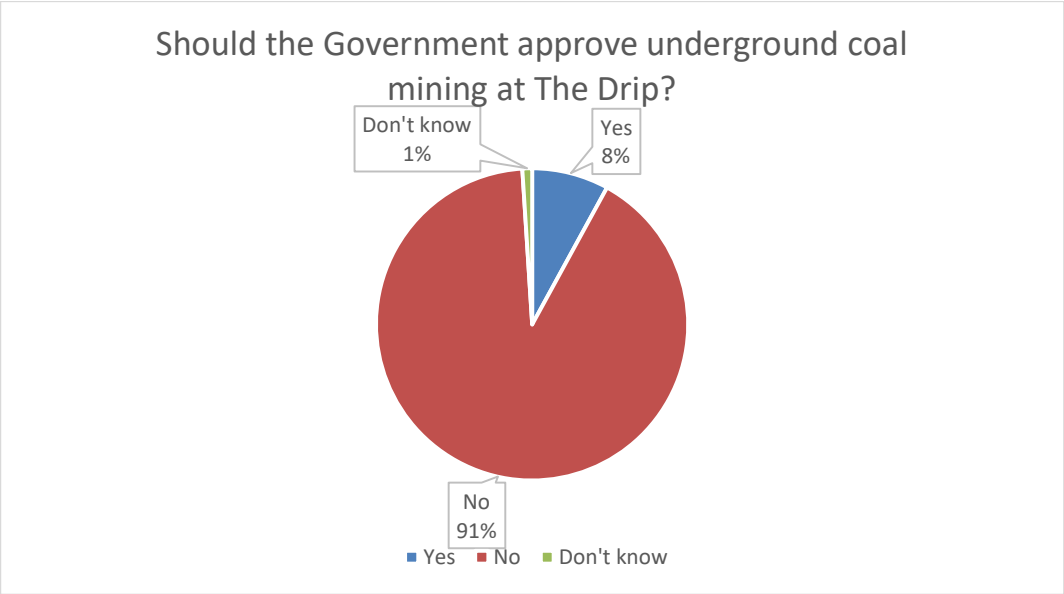
Question 6: Do you think the NSW Government should be approving coal mining that may damage groundwater and river flow at The Drip?



The clear majority, 91% of respondents stated the NSW Government should not be approving underground coal mining that may affect the groundwater and river flow at The Drip.

Comments:

No not in any way. *(NO) Or anywhere else!*

Or coal for environment.

Definitely not (response by 2).

No (response by 3).

Government should keep their hands in their pockets.

Bloke who approved should be stoned.

No new coal mines.

Need to decarbonize urgently.

Not just because of the Drip but also because we don't need more coal mining.

NO NO.

Is 200 m lateral adequate?

NO DEF NOT!! *I understand now.* *Coal is dead!*

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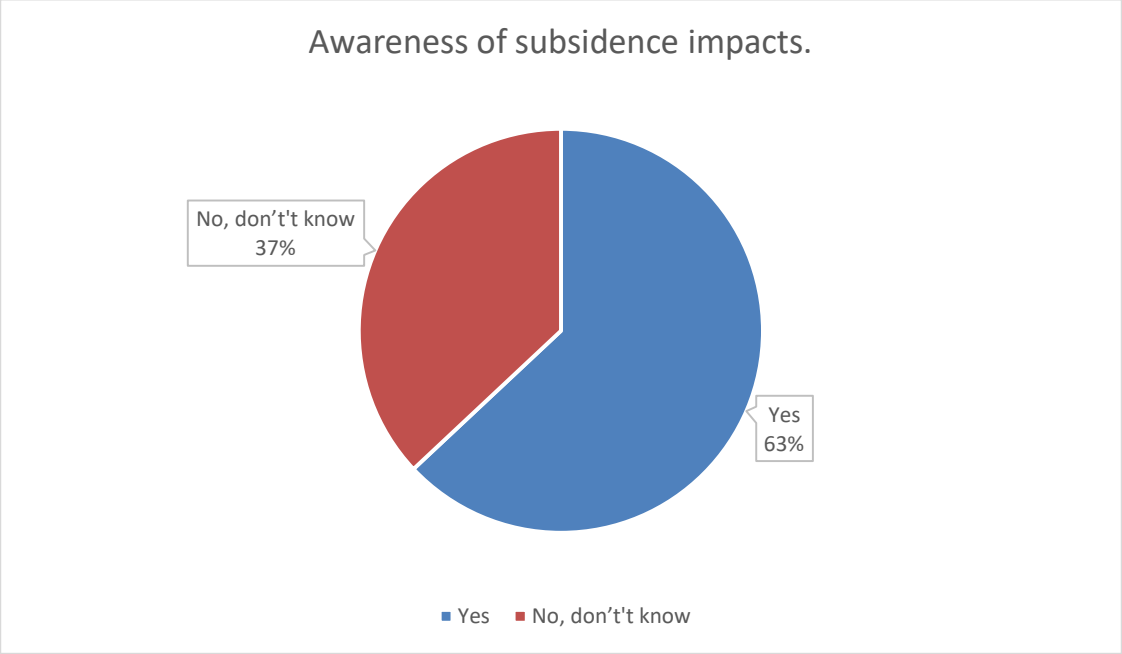
Question 7: Are you aware that underground coal mining can cause ground surface levels to drop by over 2 metres (subsidence) and cause fractures in riverbeds and sandstone cliffs over one kilometre away?



63% of visitors were aware of the deleterious affects of subsidence caused by underground coal mining.

Comments:

Seen it in other areas.

Keep them out.

No but I am aware now!

I understand now.

COAL MINING IS BAD NEWS.

Am now.

Good.

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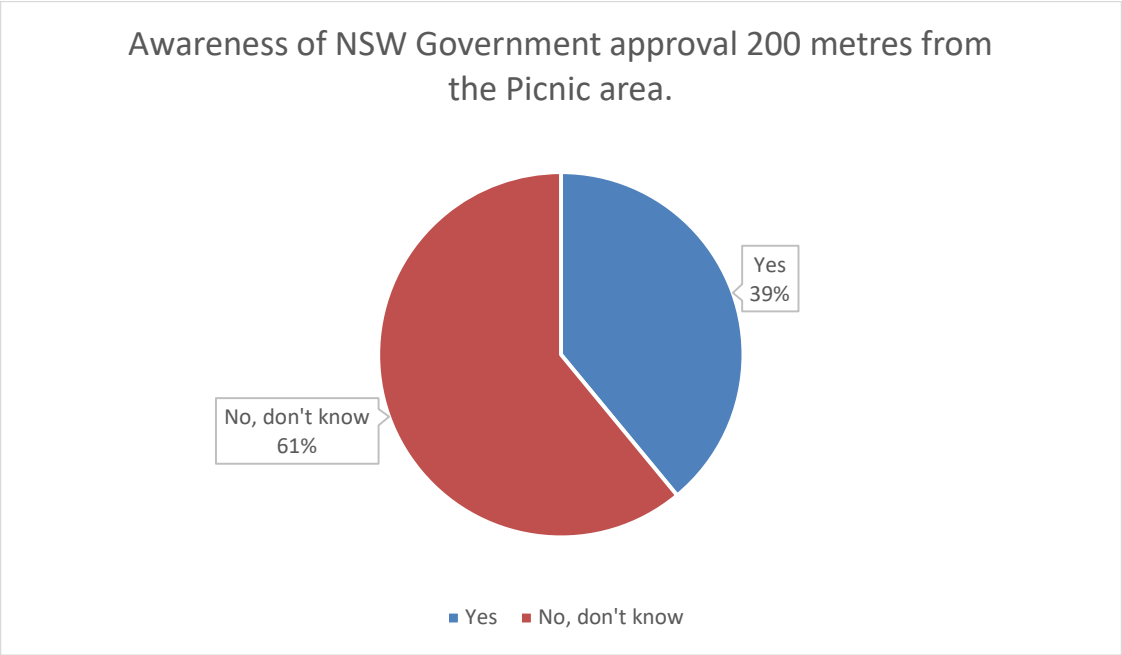
Question 8: Are you aware that underground coal mining has been approved by the NSW Government that will come within 200 metres from the river at The Drip picnic area?



Only just over 1/3 of visitors were aware that the NSW government had approved underground coal mining 200 metres from The Drip picnic area.

Comments

No should be allowed

I am now. I am horrified.

Yes, today

Despicable greedy government.

Surely not. SHOCKING.

Advised today.

I don't agree with that decision.

I thought it was 500m

Shame on NSW government.

This is dreadful.

Now I am.

Dangerous/ ruin the area

Shocking!

I am now after speaking with Rosemary.

Devastating.

I am now.

Outrageous!

Very alarming!

Local knowledge shared!

Yes, the south side of the river.

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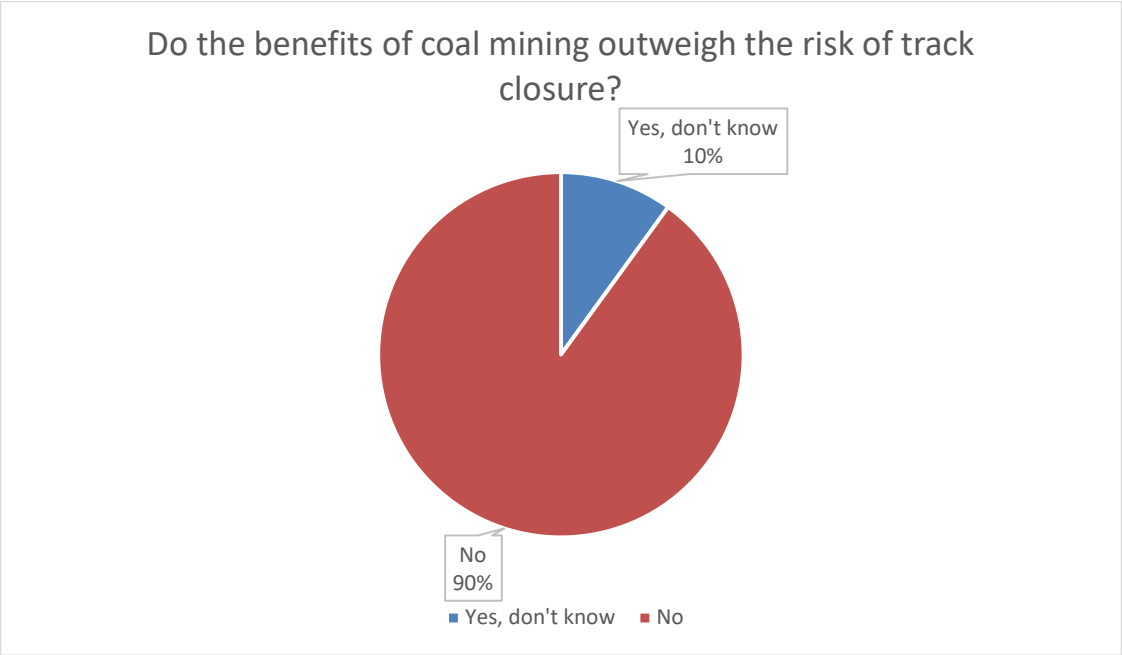
Question 9: Do you think the benefits from underground coal mining outweigh the risk that subsidence impacts may cause the closure of The Drip walking track to the public?



90% of people stated that the walking track was of more value than the perceived benefits of underground coal mining at The Drip.

Comments:

Should not be allowed

In 2022 there should be no new coal mines.

No

Definitely NOT.

Given the extent of the resource over NSW/Qld, lower risk deposits could be taken.

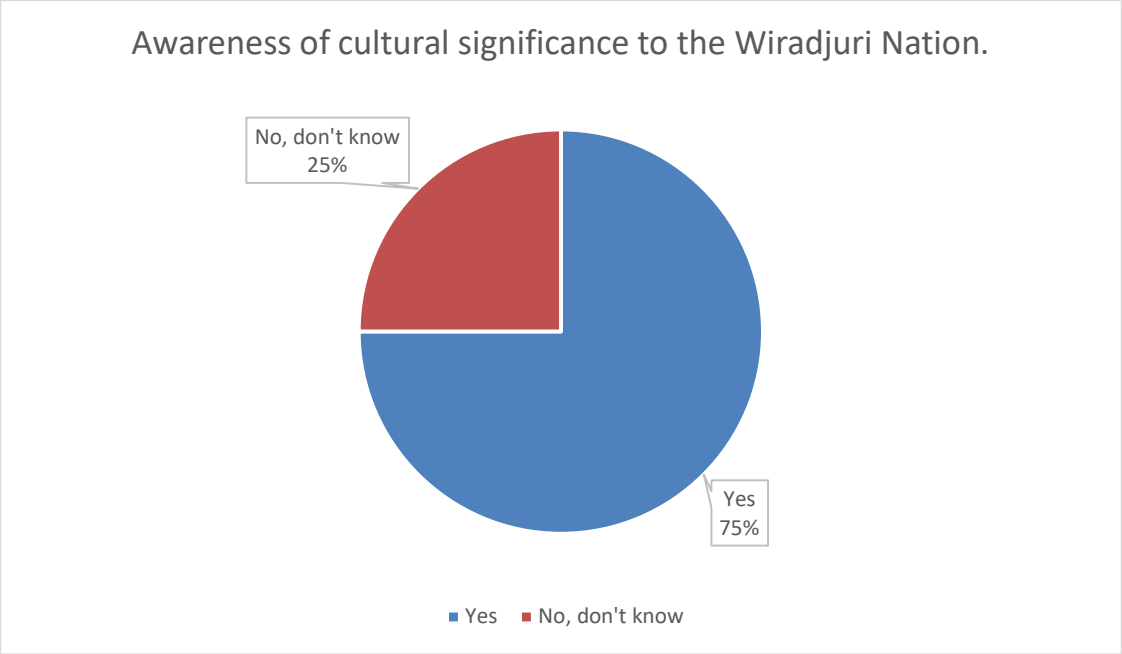
Absolutely not.

Need to have long term interests at front of decisions.

Stop mining. Other places can be mined.

It will have negative impacts on this area.

Question 10: Were you aware that The Drip is a culturally significant area to the Wiradjuri nation?



Three quarters of visitors were aware that The Drip is culturally significant to the Wiradjuri Aboriginal Nation.

Comments:

More reason to protect it.

My boys land.

Would imagine so.

Reasonable to assume it.

Very important this remains (Rio Tinto!!)

(No) But expected it was a significant site.

It's their land above and below i.e., Coal.

Good to know.

Great spot

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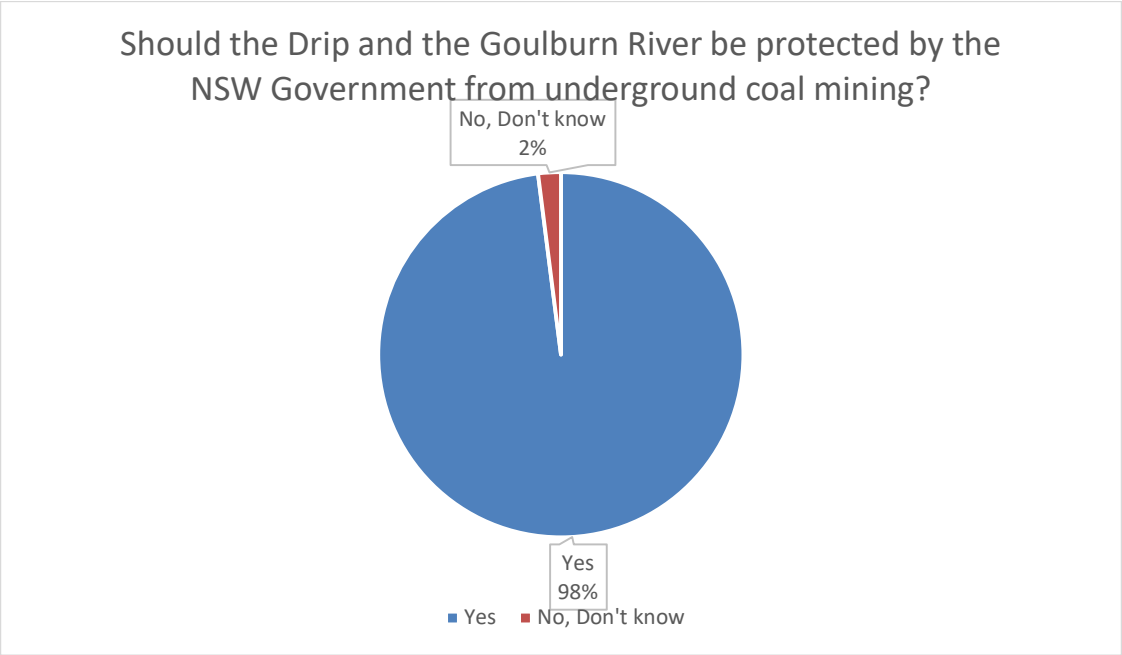
Question 11: Do you think that the land around The Drip and the Goulburn River should be protected by the NSW Government from underground coal mining?



98% of visitors stated that the NSW Government should be protecting The Drip and Goulburn River from underground coal mining.

Comments:

Absolutely (x4)

100%

Given the extent of the resource over NSW/Qld, lower risk deposits could be taken.

No questions its v. important.

Cp elsewhere.

Of course (x2).

Yes, Yes, Yes

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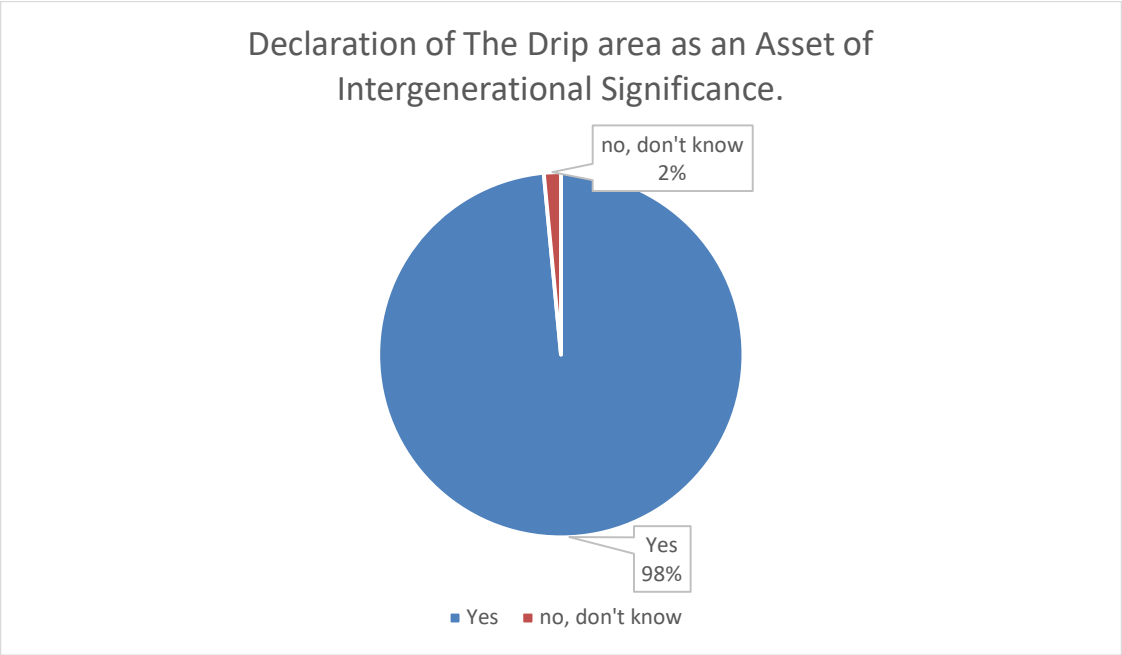
Question 12: Do you think this area should be protected for future use by generations to come, by declaring it an Asset of Intergenerational Significance?



98.5% of visitors stated that the area around The Drip should be declared Asset of Intergenerational Significance status, granting it the highest protection in the NPWS estate.

Comments:

Absolutely. Please protect/save The Drip from mining destruction.

Rescue and save land like this!! *Absolutely!*

Not many places exist like this. Don't they realise that?

Absolutely needs to be preserved!

Such a magical area it would be a disaster to spoil this wonderful place.

Certainly should. *Too many cultural assets are lost through short sighted development.*

It should be cared for all future people. *YES!*

There must be a balance. Nature must be preserved.

SAVE THE DRIP NATIONAL PARK.

Places like this should be preserved for generation to come.

Yes, spot on!! *Dunno*

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It would be terrible to lose this place.

Leave this alone!!

Don't destroy the Drip!!

Yes, it must be protected for future generations.

Coal is dead. Dug up by dinosaurs.

What a great idea. This needs to happen.

Conclusion

The Drip gorge and the Great Dripping Wall (the Drip) represent a significant, unique environment requiring NSW Government protection. This is evidenced by the 50,000 people who visit the site every year, including many who return to the place due to its beauty and value. Furthermore, The Drip is a highly significant site to the local Wiradjuri Nation. Considering this it is essential that this area be conserved and protected by the NSW Government.

There is broad and enduring community support as evidenced by the findings of our study for the protection of the highly valued and regionally significant Drip Gorge riparian area and adjacent escarpments. This can be achieved by incorporating this sensitive river corridor into full national park status within Goulburn River National Park. It is now widely accepted that the significant cultural, spiritual, historical, educational, tourism and recreational values associated with The Drip and the Corner Gorge deserves the highest protection.

The only conclusion that can be made from this study is that the NSW Government should listen to the voices of the people and protect this area from underground coal mining. Restrictions to underground coal mining to exclude a 2-kilometre buffer around this area need to be made, and The Drip gorge be declared an Asset of Intergenerational Significance for the enjoyment of generations to come.

There are some areas that require protection due to their exceptional environmental, recreational and cultural value that is above coal mining revenue. The Drip is one such place.

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Recommendations

The visitors surveyed have shown and identified that the Government must take action to:

- Protect The Great Dripping Wall, the Goulburn River and adjacent sandstone escarpments surrounding The Drip gorge from underground coal mining. This can be achieved by: extending the Goulburn River National Park to include the whole river corridor and groundwater catchment areas; upgrading the current Goulburn River State Conservation Area to National Park status; and withdrawing the current approval for Moolarben UG4 longwalls 8-14.

- Reverse the loss of public amenity that will result from the continuation, and further approvals of coal mining in this area. Members of the public, as visitors to this area, represent a significant stakeholder group. It is estimated by NPWS that 50,000 visitors come to this site every year. They have been inadequately consulted by the NSW Government as to their views on the conservation of this area with respect to underground coal mining.

- Recognise the conservation value of The Drip as an entire ecosystem and entity that exceeds in value the perceived benefits of underground coal mining. As evidenced by clear public sentiment.

- Cease underground coal mining approvals.

- Cancel the section of EL 6288 north of the Goulburn River.

- Recognise and protect The Drip gorge as a unique ecosystem, a biodiversity corridor, and refuge for species affected by climate change, in line with the goals of the Draft Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041.

- Designate the Drip Gorge as an Asset of Intergenerational Significance, as defined by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, for its ongoing protection for the benefits of generations to come (as evidenced by 98% support from visitors).

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