

Helensburgh & District **HERALD**

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Where did all the water go?

On the 16th of February 'The Northern Leader' broke news of little seen damage to the Waratah rivulet, a system of pools joined by a sandstone river bed in the Sydney Catchment Authorities (SCA) special area. The Waratah rivulet is the main head water to the Woronora River and Woronora Dam.

The inspection of the SCA zone organised by independent candidate for Heathcote, Greg Petty, revealed significant damage and shattering of the river bed in the vicinity of Flat Rock Crossing, while the believed cause, long-wall coal mining continues beneath.

"I suspect there could be substantial losses (of water). My concern is that we don't know enough about it," acknowledged Dr Young, former University of Wollongong Associate Professor of Geosciences.

"We are told that the water is not flowing above the surface, but going beneath the rock and resurfacing a few metres downstream," reported Mr Petty "although there is a lack of evidence to show that it is actually resurfacing and reaching the Woronora River".

Despite the remediation work that has been undertaken by mine operators since 2005 including the use of synthetic fillers, the Woronora Dam is currently at around just 30% full, the lowest of the major 11 SCA dams.

"Whether the two-pack polyurethane filler is having a positive effect or not is yet to be determined" and "In 2009 Premier Keneally approved the Peabody extension of the long-wall mining operation" notes Natasha Watson of the Otford Protection Society. The mining approval allows for Peabody to mine underneath the dam, despite the damage that is evident to the Waratah rivulet.

The SCA estimate releases of more than 4.1 million litres of water each day for environmental purposes (governed by legislation) and low rainfall levels are the cause, despite significant rainfall in recent months.

With the Woronora Dam level at unprecedented lows and a lack of evidence the water is simply travelling under the surface, the main head water is now further threatened by coal seam gas extraction. APEX Energy NL is seeking to begin exploration of methane gas (AI 19 borehole) with a view to future mining using the hydraulic fracturing (fracking) method which at best provides a direct link from the coal seam to the surface and changes the water table.