

Bauxite mining threatens drinking water



Photo: #Milestweedlephotography

Bauxite mining poses grave risks to WA's critical drinking water supplies. In a heating, drying climate these risks are exacerbated. It's time to end all forest mining in our drinking water catchments.

The Northern Jarrah Forests (NJF) are some of Earth's most beautiful yet vulnerable forests. They are home to many unique plants and animals and tens of thousands of years of Noongar heritage. Since 1963 these forests have been mined for bauxite, with Alcoa and South32 already clearing over 32,000ha. In the next 15 years, massive proposed expansions will threaten critical water supplies and air quality, impact worldclass trails and destroy over 10,000ha of forests – vital carbon stores and habitat for threatened wildlife.

WARNINGS IGNORED

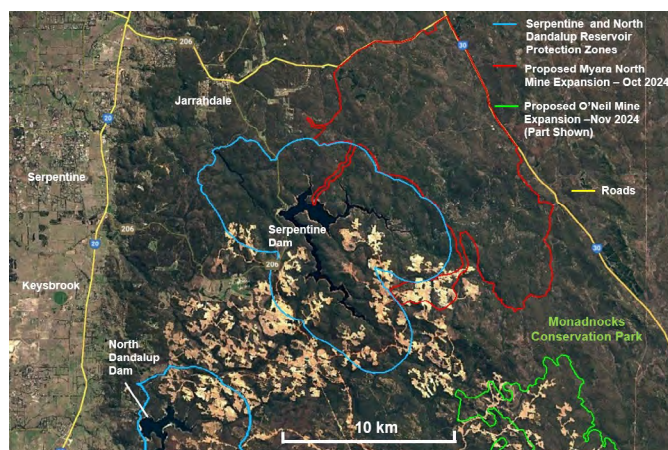
“ Bauxite mining operations represent the single most significant risk to water quality in Perth Metropolitan and Southwest drinking water catchments. ”

(Water Corporation 2022)

Despite these warnings, the State Government continues to allow bauxite mining in drinking water catchments.

DOUBLE STANDARDS

Reservoir Protection Zones (RPZ) are 2km buffers around a reservoir to protect from contamination. Members of the public are not allowed in RPZs for any reason, yet Alcoa is permitted to clear forests for mining and infrastructure in these areas.



Exposed earth of Alcoa's Huntly mine within the RPZ of Serpentine Dam and North Dandalup Dam visible on satellite map overlaid with future mining plans. Base image: Google maps

WATER SUPPLY DISASTER

- Bauxite mining and exploration 'will impact all 12 major Perth Metropolitan and Southwest surface water catchments' (Water Corporation 2022).
- This presents 'risks to water quality and security of supply through the introduction of path-ogens, the release of hazardous substances, increased turbidity and organic matter in stream flow and changes to catchment hydrology' (Water Corporation 2022).
- Water Corporation considers it a certainty that Serpentine and North Dandalup dams will be contaminated if bauxite mining in drinking water catchments continues.
- Water Corporation warns that extreme rain and fire events in mined water catchments could contaminate Perth's drinking water with silt or ash, impacting hundreds of thousands of customers with shutdowns and/or requirements to boil tap water for months or possibly years.
- In addition, the risk of contamination by PFAS or 'forever chemicals' has been reported from historic use at Alcoa's mine sites and the company was issued a prevention notice by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation in March 2023.
- Water Corporation estimated that the cost of treatment for all dams where both mining and exploration are intended in Alcoa's original 2023–2027 Mining Management Program would be roughly \$3.25 billion.



- Mining impacts are lasting, irreversible and worsened by environmental stressors including the history of logging, fire management and climate change.

SOURCES

For links to the sources view the digital copy at bit.ly/EFM-water-facts

Milne, P. 2023. Alcoa mining threatens Perth's drinking water. WAtoday, February, 8.

Various WAtoday articles on Alcoa, 2023–2024.

Water Corporation. 2022. Catchment Risk Assessment Alcoa 2023 – 2027 MMP. Released under FOI June 2024.

TAKE ACTION

Please tell the Premier and the Ministers for Environment, Water and Mines that their constituents want:

- An immediate permanent ban on all mining in Reservoir Protection Zones (RPZs) and phase out all mining in drinking water catchments by 2028
- The EPA to provide strategic advice to the Minister for Environment on the pressures on the Northern Jarrah Forest and long term management of the bioregion.
- A network of new protected areas to be created covering the remaining NJF.

EMAIL THE GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKERS

Let them know you want to see the NJF and Perth's drinking water protected from bauxite mining. bit.ly/EFM-water-action



End Forest Mining is an alliance of many groups, representing tens of thousands of people, and growing. We are calling on the Cook Government to end forest mining and safeguard WA's magnificent forests in secure protected areas. For further information visit endforestmining.org.au