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MODERN MINING WILL BENEFIT CONSERVATION

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By Hamish Bohannan



The Forest and Bird Protection Society is right to advocate for preserving the unique ecosystem of the Denniston Plateau in the Buller district.

The Plateau is home to some important native plants and animals species. It is also a historical mining site beside a town with a proud mining heritage and one that is in need of good paying jobs to sustain its families.

After considering a raft of expert evidence, a panel of independent commissioners approved Bathurst Resources' application for resource consents for an open cast mine on the Plateau. The mine will be operated in a way that delivers economic benefits for Westport, the surrounding region and the New Zealand economy, while also resulting in a net gain to the conservation estate.

There is no question that mining impacts the environment. But the area affected is small; in fact, less than 0.1 per cent of land in New Zealand is used for mining, compared to 33 per cent (or 8.7 million hectares) that is legally protected for conserving biodiversity - the highest proportion in the OECD.

We will use modern mining and rehabilitation techniques for the Escarpment mine which is in an area already disturbed by previous mining activity. Whilst we will be removing the top layer of earth to get to the coal seam and then extracting the coal, we will carefully replace the top layer together with new trees and native plants.

Other areas on the Plateau may require different methods of extraction such as underground mining or mechanised boring techniques allowing the surface to be largely unaffected.

With guidance from the Department of Conservation, we will put significant effort into rehabilitation and protection of flora and fauna. We will set up a \$250,000 trust to fund regeneration of the mine area, protect species such as the brown spotted kiwi and support control of predators, pests and weeds.

We have also committed to predator control of 5620 hectares of the neighbouring Heaphy River catchment area for the next 35 years. This work will help protect and monitor populations of the great spotted kiwi, South Island kaka and powelliphanta land snails.

Through this work and our rehabilitation of mine sites, we'll deliver environmental benefits that exceed impacts.

Bathurst managers bring a wealth of environmental expertise and an excellent track record to Buller. We also intend to provide much needed jobs and to produce an essential ingredient for the health and wellbeing of the world's population.

The hard coking coal that is mined from the Plateau is exported for use in the manufacture of carbon steel; an essential product in many everyday items including bridges, airplanes, buses and cars, water pipes, pots and pans and even wind turbines.

This coal can also be used for making carbon filters in dialysis machines and silicones for shampoos, toothpaste, lubricants and resins.

The coal from the Plateau is not thermal coal which is burnt in power stations.

We share a passion with Forest and Bird and all conservationists to protect New Zealand's conservation estate.

Bathurst firmly believes a positive settlement can be achieved for the benefit of everyone – the Westport community, the world's population and the environment both now and for future generations.

Hamish Bohannan is the CEO of Bathurst Resources.

The Escarpment Mine Project is an open cast coal mine on a 200 hectare mining permit on the Denniston Plateau in the Buller District, which is expected to employ 225 people and produce a million tonnes of premium hard coking coal a year.