AN OPEN LETTER TO AUSTRALIAN RADIO NETWORK REGARDING ITS “MILLION DOLLAR MINE” COAL PROMOTION PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NSW MINERALS COUNCIL

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13 February 2014

To the CEO, Australian Radio Network; Program Director 101.7 WSFM; Amanda Keller and Brendan Jones:

We write in regard to 101.7 WSFM’s "Million Dollar Mine" competition on the "Jonesy and Amanda Breakfast Show" in partnership with the NSW Minerals Council, culminating in the prize draw at the Mandalong coal mine in the NSW Hunter Valley on 28 February 2014.

We understand this competition promotes to the public the benefits of coal mining. We request that you withdraw from this promotion on public health grounds.

Although large profits can be made for mining corporations, many of which are overseas owned, the overall benefits of coal mining to Australian communities are less clear.

The mining, transportation and combustion of coal represent a high cost to society, as they are associated with significant risks to human health and well-being.

Multiple air pollutants that arise from coal mining and power generation are injurious to humans, including sulphur dioxide, oxides of nitrogen, and fine and coarse particulate matter. Coal combustion also releases toxic trace elements, including mercury, which is harmful to the development of an unborn child’s brain. ¹

In addition, Australia’s coal contributes to climate change and its global health impacts. This in turn threatens the health of all Australians. The health and climate costs of coal are unseen, and when costs to health systems are included, coal is an expensive fuel. ²

Coal from the Mandalong mine in the Hunter Valley, where the prize for the Million Dollar Mine promotion will be drawn, is transported by rail into and shipped through Newcastle, the world’s largest coal port.

Some 23,000 children attend school within 500 metres of the coal rail corridor supplying the port, which carries more than 4 million uncovered coal wagons per year. ³,⁴
Mandalong mine alone pumps out 16,000 kilograms of coarse particle pollution and over 4,000 kilograms of fine particle pollution a year. The coal mining industry nationally emits into the air 330 million kilograms of coarse particle pollution and over 7 million kilograms of fine particle pollution annually. ⁵, ⁶

Numerous scientific studies have linked particle pollution exposure to a variety of health problems, including increased respiratory symptoms, decreased lung function, worsening of asthma, irregular heartbeat and increased risk of heart disease, lung cancer and premature death. ¹, ⁷, ⁸

Children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of air pollution. We know that chronically elevated air pollution levels are associated with problems with lung function and development in children, increased rates of cough and bronchitis, hospital admissions and emergency department visits for asthma, and increased medication use among children with asthma. ⁸, ⁹

We note that the WSFM breakfast program's co-host Amanda Keller is the Patron of the Sydney Kids Committee, a charitable fundraising arm of the Sydney Children’s Hospital.

Ms Keller's promotion of coal through the WSFM / Minerals Council competition would appear to be inconsistent with a public commitment to child health and her patronage of the SCH.

We think your listeners deserve to have a more balanced view of the coal industry and its implications for their health and well-being. To this end, we urge you to withdraw from the Million Dollar Mine promotion, and look forward to your response by close of business on Monday 17 February, 2014.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Kingsley Faulkner, Chair, Doctors for the Environment Australia, Director of Clinical Teaching, University of Notre Dame

Professor Peter C. Doherty, Department of Microbiology and Immunology, University of Melbourne

Emeritus Professor (Population Health) Tony McMichael AO FTSE, Australian National University

Emeritus Professor (Medicine) David Shearman, MB ChB PhD FRACP FRCPE, University of Adelaide, Hon Secretary, Doctors for the Environment Australia
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Dr Roslyn Brooks, FRACGP, General Practitioner, Cooma NSW

Dr Merryn Redenbach, MBBS BMedSci CertChildAdolPsych, Research and Liaison Officer, Doctors for the Environment Australia

REFERENCES


4. Australian Rail Track Corporation Ltd, Hunter Valley Corridor 2012-2021 Capacity Strategy, June 2012, p 6. (Each coal train carries 7000 tonnes of coal and an average of 57 trains carry coal to Newcastle port each day. Each train makes 2 trips through Newcastle, equalling 114 train movements. Each train has 80-120 wagons, averaging 100. 365 days per year x 114 trains x 100 wagons = 4.16 million wagons.)


