

"Labor opposed to open-cut mining application in Cullen Bullen NSW"

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The NSW opposition has come out against a controversial proposal to expand open-cut coal mining in the Ben Bullen State Forest (BBSF), north of Lithgow.

Coalpac has applied to the state government for permission to consolidate its Cullen Valley Mine and Invincible Colliery operations at Cullen Bullen, a move the Blue Mountains Conservation Society (BMCS) says will damage more than 1000 hectares of pristine bushland and unique rock formations, known as the Gardens of Stone.

Labor environment spokesman Luke Foley told the Gazette he would actively oppose the application.

"We're opposed to open-cut mining in the Ben Bullen State Forest . . . I think that the conservationists have made the case that the Gardens of Stone has some unique biodiversity and geological characteristics that warrant environmental protection," said Mr Foley.

A large portion of the land that would be mined if Coalpac's application were approved by the Department of Planning is within an area the BMCS is campaigning to have declared a state conservation area (SCA). Mr Foley threw his support behind the push.

"We support the BBSF being declared a state conservation area. That would allow underground coal mining to continue, which we support, but would ban open-cut coal mining in that public forest," he said.

Coalpac has previously argued that investigations in the area had confirmed underground mining was not a viable option.

Mr Foley said the environmental concerns outweighed any potential impact on employment.

"I think we need a balance [between jobs and the environment]. I'm a supporter of underground mining around Lithgow. I have good relationships with people in the Lithgow mining community, including the union, but on this one I think that Labor cannot support this application for open-cut mining in this area," said Mr Foley "I note that the Lithgow Council, which has always been strongly supportive of the mining industry, has also come out against this proposal," he said, referring to that council's unanimous decision last month to oppose the proposed open-cut mining.

Coalpac's proposal hit a snag in early September when the Department of Planning announced the company's environmental assessment did not adequately address potential impacts of the project on biodiversity, Aboriginal cultural heritage, noise and air quality, and groundwater.

Coalpac will now have to prepare a new assessment before it is released for public exhibition.