

Media Release
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Police arrest 84 year old man at coal mine protest

Police have arrested an 84 year old man who locked himself to the gates of a coal mine near Narrabri in NSW.

Russ Watts stopped coal haulage operations at the Boggabri Coal Mine for more than six hours before voluntarily unlocking himself and attempting to leave the site. However, police arrested him anyway, and have taken Mr Watts to Narrabri Police Station to face charges of obstruction.

Mr Watts was protesting a planned major expansion at the mine which would have devastating impacts on biodiversity in the Leard State Forest. Today was the second day of protest in the area after two men yesterday scaled the coal-crushing plant at the Boggabri Coal Mine and were later arrested.

"The new and expanded coal mines proposed in the Boggabri area will destroy 5,000 hectares of bushland which is habitat for 21 threatened bird species, including the Barking Owl, Hooded Robin and Grey-crowned Babbler," said Phil Spark, spokesperson for the Northern Inland Council for the Environment.

"The mines will largely destroy Leard State Forest which is a haven for birds and other wildlife and a public area that is important for recreation and the quiet enjoyment of nature."

"The mines will also put at risk the local community and environs, producing 18,000 tonnes of dust each year that will be a major health risk for surrounding families."

"The NSW Government has washed its hands of the Maules Ck community and effectively given the green light to convert the area into an industrial zone."

"The reckless expansion of mining into the Gunnedah Basin is occurring without proper assessments of risks and is being driven by multi-national companies seeking export dollars at great cost to local communities."

"We are calling on the Federal Environment Minister to intervene and prevent the destruction of Leard State Forest and surrounding areas under Federal environment laws" said Mr Spark.

Photos and video are available at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/77295017@N03/>

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