

SE News
HD **Sold for a pittance**
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Coal company pays \$3/ha for iconic gorge

THE NSW Labor government sold the iconic The Drip gorge for \$2084 in a 2010 lease conversion **sale** that cost a **Chinese coal company** less than \$3 a hectare.

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"They sold it for the price of a clapped-out second-hand car," said Mudgee District Environment Group spokeswoman Bev Smiles after Land and Property Management Authority documents released this week confirmed the price paid by Yancoal subsidiary Moolarben **Coal**.

The unpublicised \$2084 conversion of more than 700 hectares of Crown land to freehold title in 2010, despite the community raising strong concerns about the possibility of such a conversion at least two years earlier, has shocked and angered groups fighting to protect the area.

"It is outrageous that public land has basically been given away, and the fact that it was public land the community had very clearly showed it wanted to protect makes it doubly shocking," said Ms Smiles.

A mine history that includes corrupt Labor ministers Ian Macdonald and Tony Kelly, and corrupt businessman Travers Duncan, has increased pressure on the NSW government to protect The Drip from future **mining** by including it in Goulburn River National Park.

In 2008, Mr Macdonald controversially introduced legislation to NSW parliament overturning a court decision that could have stopped **mining** at Moolarben. The legislation was passed and enacted within days.

In 2009, Yancoal paid \$3.5 **billion** to buy out Moolarben owner Felix Resources, delivering \$530 **million** to directors including Travers Duncan.

Mr Kelly was lands minister when the 2010 lease conversion **sale** was approved.

In 2013, the Independent Commission Against Corruption found Mr Macdonald acted corruptly in granting a **mining** licence in 2009 for another Upper Hunter mine, Mount Penny, to benefit Labor colleague Eddie Obeid, and Mr Duncan corruptly misled public officials about the involvement of the Obeid family in the same mine project.

Mr Kelly was found corrupt after an ICAC inquiry into a Sydney land **sale**, and controversially took control of Camberwell Common in 2010 and gave it to Ashton **Coal**.

Colin and Julia Imrie, whose property adjoins the gorge, wrote to the Crown Lands Office in 2008 about concerns The Drip might be converted to freehold title under the NSW government's perpetual lease conversion program.

The Crown Lands Office wrote back that The Drip had "high conservation values", and consideration might be given to "acquiring this land as it is adjacent to the Goulburn River National Park".

This week, the Imries said the previous government and its departments had been "well aware of The Drip and Goulburn River Gorges to the whole community but this did not prevent the transfer of remaining public ownership to Yancoal in 2010 without community warning or consultation".

The community was also critical of the current NSW government after an exploration licence over the area was renewed, without excluding The Drip and surrounding areas, and despite significant public opposition.

On December 8, in response to another letter from the Imries expressing concern, the Office of Environment and Heritage advised Moolarben **Coal** had applied to explore an area north of The Drip "for a possible future application to mine in the area".

The NSW Planning Assessment Commission recommended a substantial expansion of underground and open-cut **mining** at Moolarben in May this year, but supported including The Drip in the national park after noting current approvals allow **mining** up to 500 metres from the gorge.

The commission was "concerned The Drip has not yet been secured, noting the length of time this has been a concern".

Environment Minister Rob Stokes recently visited The Drip. A spokesman said the NSW government "strongly believes in the need for further protection at The Drip".

A Yancoal spokesman said the **company** bought the perpetual lease over the 700 hectares from the previous owner, but declined to nominate a price. The \$2084 was to convert the lease to freehold title.

CO yaptyl : Yancoal Australia Limited | yankua : Yankuang (Group) Corp | ynzmn : Yanzhou Coal Mining Co Ltd

IN i112 : Coal Mining Support Activities | ibasicm : Basic Materials/Resources | imet : Mining/Quarrying

RE nswals : New South Wales | apacz : Asia Pacific | ausnz : Australia/Oceania | austr : Australia

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