

I object most strongly to the proposed gold mine in Co Tyrone. This would have the potential to damage our land, water and air. It has already damaged community relations in a once tightly knit area.

Water has been called “mining’s most common casualty” [redacted] interview, Mineral Policy Center, Washington DC]. Most methods used to mine require significant amounts of water for separating minerals, cooling machinery and controlling dust. Waste from mining and processing, including residual minerals and chemicals, can contaminate water. Water can also become disrupted through sedimentation, caused by built roads and the installation of the electric posts during exploration. This can disturb the water and affect aquatic beings. Additionally, water pollution from mine waste rock and tailings may need to be managed for decades, if not centuries, after closure.

The Owenkillew river which will bear the brunt of pollution (you don’t mine without pollution) is part of the Foyle river system. The Owenkillew flows down to Newtownstewart. Water is pumped from the river at Newtownstewart to Castlederg Water Treatment Plant where it is treated and put out for public consumption. This water treatment plant services a wide area of West Tyrone.

[redacted]  
[redacted] of seeing any test results in relation to heavy metals being carried out by the Water Service. I am concerned how thorough and transparent the water testing is in Northern Ireland. Specifically, I am concerned at the lack of validation and verification of chemical testing being carried out on the drinking water supply, sourced from the Owenkillew River.

The DAERA website states that “Rivers are monitored both chemically [since early 1970’s] and biologically [since 1990’s], to assess their water quality and their level of compliance with a range of national standards, European Union [EU] Directives and international agreements.”

Due to the gold mining being a new source of potential contamination, I am concerned that there are insufficient chemical tests for heavy metals being carried out on the Owenkillew River, which could be contaminated from the mining. I believe this is a necessary validation and verification activity, specifically due to the public health and environmental risks of the mining operations. I believe that additional chemical testing needs to be carried out here for heavy metals, from the new source of potential contamination - the mining activity.

WHO state that “Most chemicals arising in drinking water are of health concern only after extended exposure of years, rather than months. The principal exception is nitrate. Typically, changes in water quality occur progressively, except for those substances that are discharged or leach intermittently to flowing surface waters or groundwater supplies from, for example, contaminated landfill sites”. [WHO, 2022, Section 8, Guidelines for drinking – water quality: fourth edition incorporating the first and second addenda] It is concerning that the:

Source – pathway – receptor model

[ mining contamination – waterway – human health]

Will not be visible imminently.

Therefore precaution must be taken to ensure that the water is adequately assessed.

