

The Lomond and Trossachs National Park's cover up of the serious environmental risks posed by the Cononish goldmine

Description

- **Adverse Incidents** - Total suspended solids breached CAR discharge thresholds on seven occasions throughout March. The 10.04.23 total suspended solids were 2600mg/l the highest level since testing began. This was reported to the NPA and was picked up in the May WQM Reporting. The cause was noted as cleaning out the pond. SGZ stated the late monitoring samples being tested and returned. Full incident reporting about the 10.04.23 incident will be included in the next three incidents during the previous reporting period. SGZ had agreed several actions with SEPA, these comprised:
 - 6 monthly clearance of the Settlement Pond. This clearance was continuing during the April visit, with sediment dry out prior to removal; and
 - Seepage Channels being cleared more frequently. This is reported by SGZ as being carried out manually (not by machinery) following clearance following adverse incidents)
- **Areas of Concern**
 - Late reporting of recent incidents to NPA/SEPA;
 - No Adverse Incident Reports issued by SGZ for this reporting period;

Extract from monitoring report 26th April.

The publication date of the April Monitoring report of the Cononish goldmine is given on the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) as 26th October ([see here](#)), four days before the Planning Committee Meeting on 30th October ([see here](#)) which considered and then “noted” the “annual report” on the mine.

There was absolutely no reference to these eleven “adverse incidents” in that “annual report” ([see here](#)) despite the significant number and the fact that one is described as the worst ever. Nor was there any mention of the number of planning conditions that had been evaluated as red in the monitoring report:

“Contravention of planning condition or major incident with potential for environmental impact – requires immediate action”.

These had increased from “3 nr red status” to “8 nr red status” between March and April, just at the time the financial difficulties facing the mine had become impossible to ignore. So what immediate actions were taken? Not even the LLTNPA Board appear to have been informed.

Instead of responding to the financial crisis at the mine, as I advocated in May ([see here](#)), staff failed to provide Board Members of any report of what was going on until the Board Meeting in October and then withheld this crucial information and what they had done about it.

Nor was there any information about these adverse incidents in the LLTNPA Chief Executive's report to the Board Meeting last Monday which contained a section on the goldmine ([see here](#)).

Board Members asked a number of good questions at the meeting about the mine but seemed reassured by the fact that the Director of Place, Stuart Mearns, had been out to visit the Friday before and, as stated in the CEO's report, officers are now:

“proactively engaging with the operating company; it's care and maintenance team along with key partner organisations and our external specialist advisors to ensure the Park Authority is prepared for

any implications or actions required in the weeks and months ahead at the site”.

There was no mention in that discussion, however, of the “adverse incidents” or what action had been taken to secure the mine site against an environmental disaster now that Scotgold is in administration. Had Board Members been told about the serious situation in April, I suspect they might have pressed a lot further.

While I was at the meeting as an observer (the only person to attend in person) and a couple of Board Members spoke to me in the breaks, unfortunately I only came across the Monitoring Report afterwards. 26th October records the date the report was due to be published but, as the LLTNPA has confirmed to me in response to a complaint, it appears once these dates are entered in the planning system they cannot be changed, whatever the actual publication date. Having checked the planning portal regularly, I am fairly certain that Monitoring Report was actually published some time later.

Whatever the case, given the seriousness of the position in April and with the mine in administration, it would be in the public interest for the LLTNPA to publish all the monitoring reports they have been undertaken since April now, rather than keeping them secret for six months. That would enable both the public and board members to see what is really going on and whether the LLTNPA’s senior management have been acting appropriately.

There is another planning committee due to be held today at 1pm. Having become aware of the April Monitoring report I wrote again to Dr Reid, the Convener of the LLTNPA, the eighth time I have done so since September, alerting her to the concerns in the monitoring report, suggesting they should be discussed at the Planning Meeting today and asking for a meeting. Having not had a response by the close of business Friday, at the weekend I forwarded that email to councillors on the LLTNPA Board using their local authority email addresses because the LLTNPA has so far refused to provide email accounts to all of its Board Members, unlike the Cairngorms National Park Authority. This morning I have sent messages to all other Board Members on the Planning Committee c/o the Committee Clerk.

The Planning Committee today is not being webcast due to “technological constraints”. It is being held in Lomond Parish Church, from where the LLTNPA Board Meeting was successfully webcast last week!. Not so much technological constraint, therefore, as a lack of budget (an external company was brought in to webcast the Board Meeting) and a determination from senior management to make it as hard as possible to find out what they are doing (or not doing as in the case of the Cononish goldmine).

It is possible of course that LLTNPA and SEPA managed to force Scotgold to fix all the problems that had caused the environmental pollution between April and when the mine laid off staff in September. The cover-up of the April incidents, however, suggests the opposite and in my view the risk of a major environmental disaster taking place at the mine has increased significantly.

Recently the Ferret published an investigation of the rivers in Scotland that are still polluted by mining. The list includes the Fillan <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-national-scotland/20231126/281711209399498> with the pollution coming from the lead mining at Tyndrum, just upstream of where the Fillan and Cononish Rivers meet, which finished well over 100 years ago. I fear history could be repeating itself.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. conservation
2. LLTNPA

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