**FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS**

*\*Two interviews with independent New England ecologists Wendy Hawes and John Hunter that say the Maules Ck mine offsets are overwhelmingly and “blatantly” wrong.  That they contain virtually no white box grassy woodland, the CEEC being cleared in Leard State Forest, and what isolated patches of this community do exist, grow at a significantly different elevation, and so support a different species mix.   John Hunter says in the areas he investigated the offset vegetation mapping prepared by Cumberland Ecology is 95% wrong.*

Response from Department:

Under the conditions of approval, the company is required to verify through independent review, that the proposed offsets meet minimum requirements for quantity and quality. The company has submitted a report of this independent review and the department is considering the report. Under the conditions of approval, if the proposed offsets are not found to be adequate, the company is required to secure additional offsets until the terms of the approval are met.

*\*There is no evidence of any government ecologist at either state or Federal level visiting the two major Whitehaven offset properties, Mt Lindesay and Wirradale.  So despite the size of the mine, and the importance of the biodiversity to be bulldozed, there was no official ground truthing of the Whitehaven offset claims prior to Federal approval.*

Response from Department:

It is the Department of the Environment’s policy for environmental assessment purposes that information, surveys and analysis requiring specific expertise, such as ecological assessments, is organised and provided by the proponent through the Environmental Impact Statement process. The onus is on the proponent to provide accurate information to Government. There are provisions under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* that address circumstances of the deliberate provision of false and misleading information.

Further, under the conditions of approval, the company was required to commission the services of an independent expert ecologist to undertake the verification of the offsets.

*\*That the Federally listed endangered plant tylophora linearis, missed in Whitehaven environmental reporting, exists in several locations within Leard State Forest.  At least one of those locations is now marked for imminent clearing.  And that while the Minister has been made aware of this fact, no action has been taken to halt mine development.*

Response from Department:

Under condition 32 of the Maules Creek mine approval, in the event that any additional matters of national environmental significance are recorded within the project area and a significant impact on the matter is likely, the department must be notified in writing within 14 days of the matter being recorded. The information provided to the Minister in regard to *tylophora linearis* has been provided to the Department for consideration in the context of the conditions of approval for this project.

Response from **Minister**:

“I am aware that there are concerns around the suitability of the offsets put forward by the proponent and approved by the previous Labor government. An independent review of the proposed offset areas has been submitted and the Department of the Environment is considering the findings of the review to determine whether the proposed offsets satisfy the requirements of the approval conditions”.