

Anglesea Heathlands



Southern Emu-wren in the Anglesea heathlands. Photo: Geoff Gates

A coal mine for 50 years or protected forever?

Every year in spring, the small, seaside community of Anglesea on Victoria's Great Ocean Road reveals a world most of us rarely see.

It's a world filled with magical names such as the Thick-lip Spider Orchid, Common Everlasting and Blue Fairy.

Naturalists, orchid lovers, families and friends spend spring spellbound by the incredible beauty and diversity of the flora species found on the Anglesea heathlands, which are home to more than a third of Victoria's known orchid species.



Alcoa's open cut mine at Anglesea.

Such species richness makes these heathlands a place of both national and international significance.

Threatened by mining

But despite being such an ecologically

rich area, aluminium giant Alcoa wants to dig up and mine a further 300ha of this fragile, heritage-listed heathland.

Alcoa has operated an open cut mine and power station in the area since 1968. It was first granted a 50 year lease over the Anglesea heathlands in 1961.

However, that decision was made before the incredibly high botanical significance of the region was recognised, and it's now time for the Victorian Government to protect the heathlands by including them as part of the Great Otway National Park.



Salmon Sun Orchid



Eastern Pygmy Possum



Common Fringe-lily

Anglesea heathlands, home to Victoria's orchid paradise

The Anglesea heathlands are incredibly important to nature conservation in Victoria. Lying in the rain shadow of the Otway Ranges, their unique geological structure has given rise to a remarkable number of plant species in a relatively small area.

Within this unique landscape is one of the richest and most biologically diverse vegetation communities in the world, one that is home to more than 700 different plant species and a third of all orchid species found in Victoria.

Four of these plant species are listed as rare or threatened at a national level, and 21 have been listed by the Victorian Government as rare, threatened or endangered at a state level.

Four species, the Anglesea Grevillea, Anglesea Leek Orchid, Large Bearded Greenhood (Anglesea) and the Anglesea Grey-gum, are found nowhere else in the world.

The heathlands also provide important habitat and refuge for a range of native animals, including the critically endangered New Holland Mouse, Southern Brown Bandicoot, White-footed Dunnart, and Yellow-bellied Glider, rare for this part of Victoria.

No place for coal mine expansion

When Alcoa was first given the go-ahead to mine coal in the Anglesea heathlands the Victorian Government was prepared to put industrial development before all other considerations, including environmental concerns.

But now we know much more about the area, including the incredible significance of these flora-rich, heritage-listed heathlands.



Photo: Elizabeth Donoghue
www.elizabethdonoghuephotography.com

Where the wild things grow

Every spring the Anglesea heathlands put on a wildflower and orchid display that draws thousands of nature lovers from across Australia.

Local environment group ANGAIR takes advantage of the seasonal display by holding its annual Wildflower and Art Show Weekend, which includes guided walks and bus tours of the surrounding bushland to see indigenous flowers in their natural habitat.

Visitors who spend a bit of time searching the nearby bushland are well rewarded with glimpses of the usually shy local orchids, of which up to 100 different species can be seen at this time of year.

Proceeds from the show are used for local land conservation initiatives.

For more information on this fantastic event visit the ANGAIR website: www.angair.org.au.

Yet despite community opposition Alcoa is insisting it has a right to renew its lease of the land for another 50 years, and refuses to rule out the possible destruction of rare heathland and woodland to the north and west of its current open cut mine.

Alcoa has already advised the Victorian Government of the proposed mine extension, but has not made public detailed plans of its mining intentions and is yet to carry out an Environmental Effects Statement for the area.

Protecting the heathlands

Local environment and community groups strongly oppose Alcoa's future mining plans.

These groups, which include the Geelong Environment Council, the Anglesea and Aireys Inlet Society for the Protection of Flora and Fauna, the Victorian National Parks Association, and the Friends of the Eastern Otways want to see all heathland outside the current mine added to the Great Otway National Park and protected for future generations.

Donate

This brochure was created by the Geelong Environment Council, a regional conservation organisation that was responsible for the National Estate listing of the Anglesea Heath in 1990. You can contact us on 0417 100 206 or by emailing gecinc@bigpond.com. If you would like to make a donation, cheques and money orders can be sent to PO Box 771, Belmont, Victoria 3216.





The open cut mine at Anglesea is surrounded by rare heathlands that are home to a third of all orchid species found in Victoria.

Alcoa must save rare heathlands

Alcoa has leased 7221 hectares known as the Anglesea Heath since 1961, when it signed a 50-year deal with the Victorian Government to operate an open cut mine and 150 megawatt power station to power its aluminium smelter 35 kilometres away at Pt Henry.

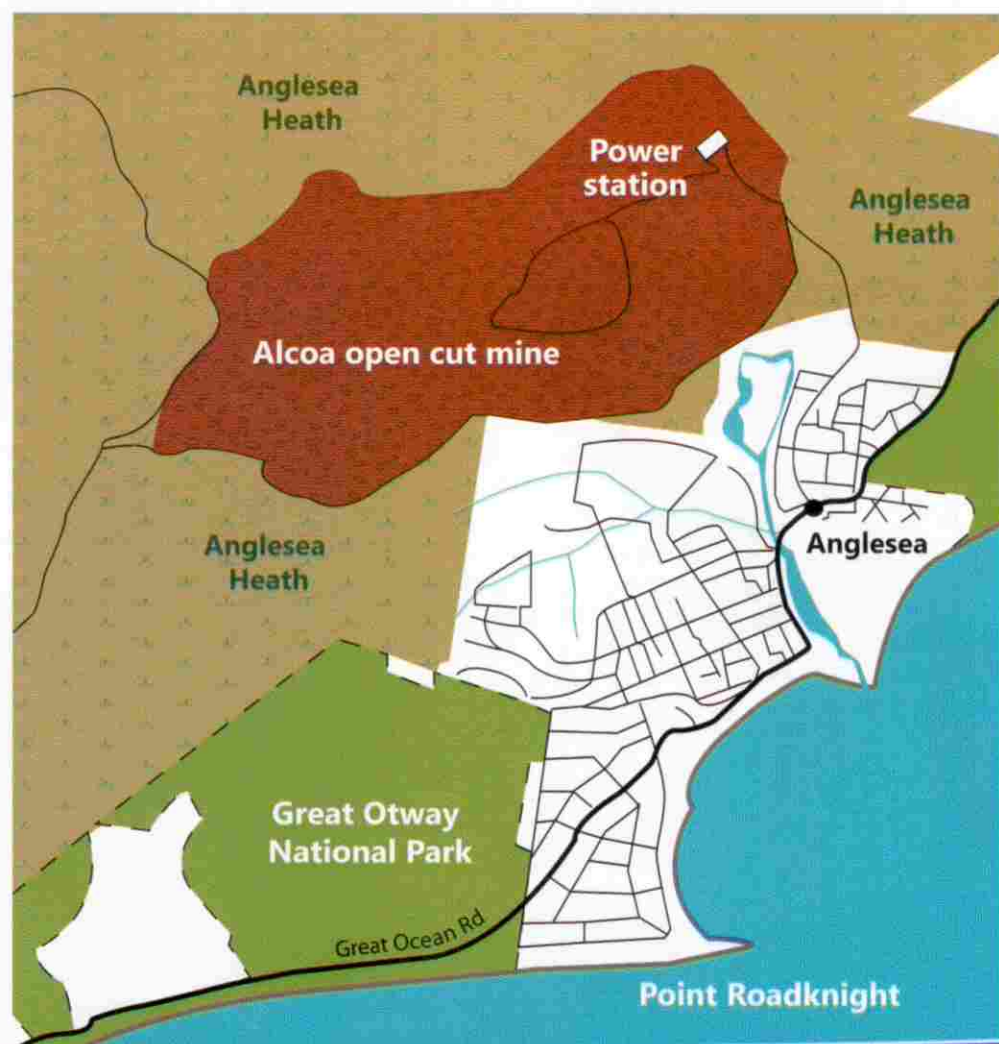
The existing mine is the result of digging up 300ha of Anglesea heathlands to make way for coal mining operations and is expected to provide enough fuel for the Alcoa smelter until 2016.

Anglesea power station is the smallest coal-fired power station in Victoria and, according to Environment Victoria, could be replaced with cleaner energy sources including renewables and gas.

The Anglesea power station and Alcoa Pt Henry aluminium smelter are ageing and would need upgrading in the long term.

The impacts of coal mining include the total destruction of valuable ecosystems and landscapes, and an increase in CO₂ emissions, a major greenhouse gas.

If Alcoa agreed to mine the lower coal seam in its current mine instead of expanding operations into environmentally sensitive areas it is expected the company could continue its current operations until 2022. This was Alcoa's preference as late as 2007.





Striated Fieldwren.
Photo: Geoff Gates

Help protect the Anglesea heathlands

Right now the Victorian Government has before it plans by Alcoa to continue mining the internationally significant Anglesea heathlands for another 50 years, plans that would result in a doubling in size of the current mine and the loss of extremely rare native habitat.

You can help stop this destruction by writing to both Alcoa and the Victorian Government asking them to come up with an alternative solution that would protect the Anglesea heathland as part of the Great Otway National Park.

Please write to Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu, his minister for planning Matthew Guy, and Alan Cransberg, Managing Director of Alcoa Australia, asking them to come up with a lease option that protects the Anglesea heathland.

Points to make

- The Anglesea heathlands are listed on the Register of the National Estate for their biodiversity value, both in terms of their highly diverse flora and abundance of native wildlife.
- They protect more than 700 species of plants including more than 100 different orchid species and are an ecological asset of international significance.

Any new lease signed by the Victorian Government with Alcoa must stipulate:

- Alcoa is to utilise the existing coal mine site, digging deeper for coal, rather than destroying heathland to expand the current site.
- It should run for no more than 10 years until alternative energy sources can be found to power the smelter.
- The rest of the current lease site be immediately added to the Great Otway National Park and managed by Parks Victoria.
- No further heathland is destroyed.
- No sale or sub-lease of the coal mine area managed by Alcoa is permitted.
- Alcoa must further investigate the use of natural gas and renewable energy sources to power its Pt Henry smelter.

Contact details

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Take action online

Visit the Victorian National Parks Association website to find out how you can take action online.

- > www.saveourheath.vnpa.org.au
- > www.geelongenvironment.org.au



Mantis Orchid.
Photo: Margaret MacDonald