**Friends of**
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# NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release** **Tuesday 23 April 2024**

**Aerial photographs and ground surveys show that substantial areas of the Minnamurra River estuary ecosystem are dead and dying adjacent to Boral Limited's recent and expanding sand mine pit it is dredging on an Aboriginal sacred site, south of historic Dunmore House.**

FOMR Inc. has sent its photographs and reported its discovery of the large dieback to the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA), the NSW Department of Primary Industries and the NSW Department of Planning and Environment and requested an immediate investigation to determine a cause or causes.

Local residents report first noticing the dieback in early March 2024 with affected areas expanding since.

The FOMR Inc. photographs, some of which accompany this News Release, show a grey-brown area of dead and dying mangrove and intertidal ecosystem in the river estuary just offshore and nearly the full width of Boral's sand dredging site 5B and its surrounding lease.

The estuary dieback areas also appear to extend from the larger area near the shore, along both sides of tidal channels fringed with dead and dying mangroves, to a number of smaller dieback areas closer to the main river.

The dieback to the southwest of the river channel itself can be seen across the river from Minnamurra Village and from the old Princes Highway road bridge.

Boral's dredge pit and the lake forming in it, from which Boral's floating dredge operates five days a week, can be seen in the background of some of the the photos of the dieback areas.

Boral started dredging the Aboriginal sacred site in late October 2023 and the size of the dredge pit lake expands daily as the company continues to take sand from the site to a depth

[1] Friends of Minnamurra River (FOMR Inc.) is an active incorporated community-based association formed six years ago to conserve, protect and enhance the estuarine and catchment ecosystems of the Minnamurra River. It has qualified expertise available to it and within its membership in plant and animal ecology, archaeology, hydrology and environmental science.

of 27 metres. The dredge pit area, eventually of 7.5 hectares (18.5 acres), will be left as a private lake when Boral exhausts the sand supply within about 12 months.

In mid-February 2024, Boral cut and cleared all vegetation on its 5B mining site, including a 400-year-old Bangalay sand forest and its associated rare Southeast Littoral Rainforest, the habitats of endangered birds and animals and all supposedly protected by NSW and federal government legislation.

FOMR is also reporting the river estuary's ecosystem dieback to the federal government's Department of Climate Change, Environment and Water (DCCEW) because a large area of Saltmarsh, listed and protected as a critically endangered ecological community under the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, is interspersed with mangroves in areas also extending from the near-shore dead and dying estuary ecosystem adjacent to Boral's mine site.

In addition to the large area of dieback occurring in the intertidal zone of the estuary, FOMR is also seriously concerned about the health and future of the Commonwealth-protected Saltmarsh area.

NSW government environment and estuary management authorities list a number of causes of mangrove and associated ecosystem dieback in NSW estuarine environments.

Most of them are related to changes in drainage patterns and changes in relative percentages of freshwater to saltwater in intertidal environments caused by "threats including physical disturbance from clearing riparian vegetation, foreshore development, dredging and various on-water activities."[2]

Changes in local hydrology also causes Mangrove dieback. Mangroves must have not only tidal interchange but tidal salinity levels of about 50:50 saltwater and freshwater for healthy growth and survival. Changes in the saltwater/freshwater balance has been shown to cause mangrove and associated ecosystem dieback elsewhere in NSW previously.

FOMR is also reporting the dieback to Kiama Municipal Council and Shellharbour City Council.

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[2] https://www.marine.nsw.gov.au/marine-estate-programs/threat-and-risk-assessment.

**FOMR Photo 1 – 16-04-24:** ***An overview of the main areas of dieback in the Minnamurra River estuary ecosystem: Boral Limited's Site 5B dredge pit, dredge lake and surrounding earthworks in its leasehold area is at top, about 200m from the start of the estuary intertidal zone in which can be seen, at centre, the larg egrey dieback area extending nearly the width of the Boral leasehold. The dieback is extending generally easwards along tidal channels to a further dieback area, the grey areas at bottom, closer to the river's main channel.***

**FOMR Photo 2 – 16-04-24:** ***More dead and dying mangroves on both sides of a tidal channel leading from the general area of the main near-shore dieback towards the main river channel.***

**FOMR Photo 3 – 16-04-24: This time looking generally north, another overview of the main dieback area (dark grey, among the green intertidal mangroves' area, centre) closest and adjacent to the Boral sand mining dredge pit and earthworks. In the background, across the main river channel, is Minnamurra Village and the old Princes Highway road bridge, in the background.**

**FOMR Photo 4 – 22-04-24:** ***Another overview of the (light grey) dieback area in the Minnamurra River estuary's intertidal zone closest to the Boral dredge pit, mine earthworks and leased area, which is out of sight about 350 metres to the right. The light grey/green area projecting from the right just above the centre of the photo, is critically endangered and federal government-protected Saltmarsh. The faint line of mangroves running horizontally right to left just below the residential area shown, marks the Minnamurra Rover channel.***