

Submission to Senate committee Inquiry into impacts of mining in the Murray Darling Basin

I live in the upper catchment of the Namoi Valley near the town of Willow Tree, NSW. With coal mines in operation near Narrabri, Baan Barr, Gunnedah and Werris Creek the impact of mining are all too obvious to us now.

- Rail traffic has increased dramatically, bringing with it noise pollution of unprecedented levels and as predicted by mining companies, will only increase to as much as two trains loaded per hour going south and two empty going north .
- Dust from the uncovered coal wagons settles up to 600 meters from the rail line in Willow Tree and Quirindi which to say the least is upsetting to the residents of both towns.
- Exploration activities by mining companies are disruptive to land holders and residents alike with potential damage to productive land a very present danger.

With the current push to open up more areas to mining in the Namoi Valley and The Darling Downs I have grave concerns about the potential destruction of water resources, both above and underground, also the potential of degradation of prime agricultural land, that must be addressed by this committee.

Points that I believe need to be addressed with water ‘Australia’s liquid gold ‘ in the Namoi Valley and the Darling Downs I now raise.

- To my knowledge there is not one town, village or provincial city within the Namoi Valley or the Darling Downs that does not rely in part or whole on underground water for it’s survival. If that water supply was to become contaminated or the flow interrupted by mining activities or exploration, the community cost would be enormous.
- If underground water is contaminated or flow interrupted, even in a “local” area, the loss of production and the forcing of people to move to other areas would be a cost and logistical nightmare that no Government could bare. Be mindfull that a “local” area affected could be thousands of hectares given the interconnectivity of underground streams.
- Production of food to feed Australia will be lost if contamination of water or interruption of flow was to occur in the Namoi Valley and the Darling Downs given the amount of irrigation that occurs in these regions. Irrigation in some peoples opinion may be objectionable but given we all live in the driest continent on Earth truly our survival as a nation depends upon it to feed us all.
- With highly productive land found in the Namoi Valley and the Darling Downs to mine under it or to dig it up is not to the benefit of our nation. With land being covered by houses on the eastern sea board more and more pressure is being placed on areas like the Liverpool Plains to produce a wider variety of agricultural produce to cover for the productive land lost to development of housing for our increasing population. Any contamination of water or interruption to the flow of surficial or underground water would destroy our ability to fill the food gap that would develop.

A lot is known about the relationship between above ground water and underground water but there is more to be learnt, this can only be achieved by a complete indepth independent study of the whole of the Murray Darling Basin. The continued production of food to feed our nation is dependant on the continued availability of clean water and productive prime soils.

I believe it to be incumbent on this Senate Inquiry to look at the long term satiability of food production in the Namoi Valley and the Darling Downs and indeed across the whole Murray Darling Basin.

In years to come I would liked too be looked upon by future generation as “the ones who had the courage to stand up and secured the future for us”. Let us not leave a land of degradation to our children.