

**To: The Committee Secretary,  
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts**

## **Inquiry into the impacts of mining in the Murray Darling Basin**

**Submitting Organisation: Biological Farmers of Australia Ltd**

### **Comment and recommendations in relation to the Senate Inquiry:**

**With a specific focus on the potential impacts of the proposed AMBRE development in Felton Valley on organic and biological farmers and restrictions on access to uncontaminated irrigation waters:**

- This proposal for mining in the above noted area poses significant and unacceptable risk to the supply of good quality ground water for food production, in addition to jeopardizing the viability of certified organic farmers in the district.
- Water surveys<sup>1</sup> suggest that the complex nature of underground and surface water interaction and recharge processes of this region place farming activities, in particular organic farming, at risk from the proposed activities. The Condamine headwater sub-catchments, as part of the Murray-Darling system, are very sensitive areas where contamination could easily occur to both underground and surface water supplies as a result of mining activities, in turn impacting on farming activities in the region.
- Existing certified organic farming operations, many of which can take 3 to 10 years to fully establish as high performing organic operations, need to be prioritized and protected in this context as efficient users of irrigation waters and producers of high value added products for the region, employing additional people of farm and delivering additional ecosystem services.
- Sustainable and renewable communities and employment must be the priority in resource decisions, taking a longer term (ie more than 30 year) view.
- Water and healthy, arable soils are becoming scarce resources. Their use needs to be prioritized for food production in the first instance in Australia's and in a regional community's longer term interests, particularly where there is competition for finite resources such as arable soils and ground and surface water resources.
- Biological and organic farming deliver an added edge both to production systems in relation to sustainability and resource conservation, while adding the opportunity for higher value adding of end products. The growth in demand for such products sees Australia with a natural competitive advantage to supply into this demand<sup>2</sup>. There are well established organic farms that may be directly impacted by this proposal, which would negatively impact both on the operators in question as well as the broader

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<sup>1</sup> Geologic Modelling for Groundwater Applications in the Condamine Headwater Sub-catchments, Queensland. (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism, Geoscience Australia. Australian Government. ISBN 978-1-921236-76-1)

<sup>2</sup> The Australian Organic Market Report (2008) Principle researcher: Dr Kristiansen, University of New England, published by BFA, Chermside, Brisbane.

community. Such production systems cannot overnight be relocated to other areas given the stringent requirements outlined in the Australian Organic Standard 2006<sup>3</sup> and similar international market requirements for such operators.

- Arable land must be protected via a “**food vision**” from alternative uses which would otherwise detract from the nation’s ability to produce a growing volume of sustainably produced, value added products, for a growing population in Australia and the broader region.
- Mining in such regions as this have finite lifespans whereas horticultural and other similar operations can continue indefinitely in turn employing a vibrant community and enhancing the ecological assets of the region.

**The core concerns therefore to be addressed are:**

- A need to ensure that **food production is prioritized** in any resource use assessment which may directly impact on the viability of limited areas of arable land, let alone high value certified organic lands.
- Assessing the longer term **security of underground water supplies** for licensed irrigators, as well as its non **contamination** from external activities such as mining in the region is critical to ensure both resource security as well as business investment certainty in such primary production operations.
- Environmental management of dust and other **contaminants** in surrounding environment from mining and transport activities.
- Potential **loss of income and livelihood** from losing organic certification status and general primary production livelihood due to ambient contaminants and/or water pollution.

**Biological Farmers of Australia Ltd (BFA)** is a broad based, 1500 member owned industry association servicing the needs and interests of farmers, value adders, marketers and consumers with an interest in organic and natural foods and fibres produced from sustainable, resilient, biological farming systems.

BFA is proudly renowned for its pragmatic, business and productivity oriented approach to the future of agriculture and food production in Australia. BFA is Australia’s largest member based and services oriented representative network within the organic sector.

The BFA has over 20 years of experience in representing and servicing the organic and biological agricultural and food sectors, and owns the now increasingly well recognised brand “**Australian Certified Organic**” with the **Organic Bud** logo in the Australian and overseas marketplace, while certifying the majority of organic farmers, value adders and marketers, large and small, in Australia via its certification subsidiaries.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Organic Standard (2006) published by BFA, Chermside, Brisbane.

BFA's vision for food production in Australia is one that sees increasing opportunities for primary producers value adding and capitalizing on Australia's natural competitive advantages to produce biologically and organically, and a growing base of consumers appreciating this value.

It is recognized that for this vision to be realized, a number of policies and strategies need to be brought to bear, including a clear **national food policy vision** that prioritises not only natural and biological farming, but works to protect and enhance the very **resource base** upon which those systems are based, including **water ecology** and **water resources**, wildlife and native species, along with healthy **soil systems** that are biologically active and resilient to withstand significant climate fluctuations as part of Australia's naturally harsh environment.

This submission is written with these assumptions in mind.

Submitted by:

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On behalf of Biological Farmers of Australia Ltd