

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACTS OF MINING IN THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN

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

From: Marilyn Bidstrup

Background: My husband and I have been farming in the Warra district for the past 35 years. On our farms we grow a variety of crops including Chick peas, Mung Beans, Sorghum, Cotton and Wheat. In the later years our sons have come home after university to join us in our farming operations. Our farming operations are in the Surat Basin of Queensland at the headwaters of the Murray Darling system.

Submission:

We farm on a highly fertile floodplain which is known as Haystack Road. Currently The Queensland Government's Tarong Energy has a MDL over this area and are planning to on sell this MDL to the highest bidder. We have been informed that they do not wish to mine this site themselves.

In one year the properties involved at Haystack Road produced enough wheat for 68 million loaves of bread, enough sorghum to feed 14 million chickens or to make 79 million beef sausages and enough barley to produce 7 million plus stubbies of beer. As well as growing all of the above we grow thousands of tonnes of edible chickpeas and mung beans as well as other specialty crops. So highly fertile is this area that all this happens without any irrigation.

If open cut mining is allowed to go ahead - the issues of salt and acid contents in the soil that the mine will bring up from the underground will be immense. All runoff water in our area goes to the Condamine River - surely we all need to consider what the effects this will have on the River system. We have seen the problems that have been in Central Queensland with the Fitzroy River and the discharges from the Lady Annie Mine near Mount Isa. Rain events do happen and there is nothing put in place to prevent these disasters. The EPA does not seem to be doing a lot to prevent it from happening again. The mining companies only seem to get a tap on the fingers – naughty boys.

We need to consider the subject of future food security in Australia. This land is some of the most productive and fertile in Australia and Professor Neal Menzies, a Professor of Soil and Environmental Chemistry at the University of Queensland has stated on ABC Australia Talks that soil structure such as that on Haystack Road has not successfully been rehabilitated before and does not believe that at this time it is possible to do so. Surely we should be as self sufficient in food as we as Australians can be and not reliant on other countries. Our Asian neighbours' are very heavily populated and are already struggling to be self sufficient in food. A hungry neighbour will not be a friendly one. Not only will there be a loss of food production but it will also be a loss of our rural communities that we know. Most businesses in the towns of Dalby and Chinchilla would not be here today if not for agriculture. Only a small proportion of employees from the mine and gas operations actually reside in our communities – most work their shifts and then go away (back to the city or the coast) for their days off. This doesn't make for great community relations. The pubs and clubs in the area do well (except for when they have to shut early for the fights) but for other business houses it is a different story – many of them have lost trained employees to the mines. The mining companies are not paying for their apprenticeships'. Our Deputy Premier has said that mining will be here for 20 or 30 years and we need to have a plan for when this mining comes to an end.

We also have the issues of coal seam gas. These projects are bringing up millions of tons of salt in the water and at present are stored in ponds to evaporate. If one of these ponds should burst this too would also end up in the Condamine River. This is not to mention seepage before the ponds had to be lined! The Environmental Protection Authority does not seem to be doing enough to protect these disasters from happening. Now the CSG projects are to desalinate the water and re-inject the salt brine and other toxic wastes back down into the aquifers – supposedly the same aquifer that the water came from in the first place. These aquifers are used for town water supplies, for irrigation and for livestock water and if this salt brine should end up in a wrong aquifer could potentially be a disaster. In all, it is a guessing game and surely for all Australians this is not good enough. Environmentally, for both land and water issues could be an absolute disaster. Disasters do happen, and if nothing is put in place to protect it from happening then we only have ourselves to blame.

Summary:

While, we would all agree that Australia economically needs these power projects, I feel that people must be made accountable for their business operations before it is too late. The Environmental Protection Authority has to exercise more control over these operations so that business are made to be accountable. In all, I feel that it is a disaster waiting to happen.