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Burdekin River
Irrigators Association

Emerging Primary
Industries Groups

- Biological Farmers
of Australia
- Queensland
Aquaculture
Industries
Federation

23rd September 2009

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia
Sent via email:
eca.sen@aph.gov.au

**Submission to the Inquiry into the impacts of mining in the
Murray Darling Basin by the Senate Standing Committee on
Environment, Communications and the Arts**

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) makes this submission in response to the inquiry into the impacts of mining in the Murray Darling Basin by the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts.

The Federation represents the interests of 14,000 farmers in the intensive agriculture industry in Queensland. Agriculture contributes over \$13 billion to the Queensland economy and employs over 60,000 people.

QFF appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission and particularly appreciates the committees' indulgence in approving extra time.

Introduction

The Murray Darling Basin (the Basin) is one Australia's most important assets in terms of its ability to support primary production from farmers and mineral resource exploration. Millions of Australians directly rely on the natural resources in the Murray Darling. Whether it is the food we eat, the energy we consume, or the export dollars we earn, all Australians benefit from the sustainable development that should be evident in the Basin. To achieve this level of sustainability, Government must show policy leadership and provide investment in research and planning that allows all industries that need to access the resources of the Basin and the communities that rely on that access to do so in harmony with each other and a future healthy Basin.

This submission makes a number of observations about how this is not happening at the moment. Failures in the existing process include:

1. Development assessments take a project by project approach to environmental assessment. This "jigsaw puzzle" approach to environmental mitigation means that the impact of large developments on shared resources particularly aquifers and floodplains are not adequately assessed.
2. Traditional project based environmental assessment do not take into account the provisions that should be made to mitigate against the potential for the loss of agricultural production as a result of mining exploration or production activities. Viewing the impact of mining purely from an environmental perspective is not good enough. The inclusion of agricultural production assessments could assist this process significantly.
3. Planning policies have completely failed to identify strategically important agricultural resources that must be protected from significant impact from mining. Once identified and categorised this determination should be built into the approvals process and associated cost drivers could be established to provide a disincentive to resource exploration on the most important agricultural landscapes.
4. There is vast uncertainty in our understanding of the impact from mining activities on underground aquifers (particularly the combined impact) and the approval and assessment process must recognise this uncertainty. Mining can affect surface or groundwater systems, eg erosion of river banks and floodplains, impacts on aquifers through draw down or injection, but the extent is unknown.
5. There is vast uncertainty in our understanding of the impacts of waste from mines on the quality of water in waterways and potential for associated salinity hazards.
6. There is an inconsistency in the way in which significant mining operations are required to comply with vegetation management laws as compared to the agricultural sector and this encourages division within the community.

Summary

The concerns raised above by QFF and by many other groups and individuals who are personally affected by this issue highlight the need for State and Federal Governments to work together with industry to assess the potential for the shared impact of mining developments.

To date the assessment for approvals for mining developments have only been made on the basis of mitigating environmental impacts. There is now a need to include mitigation strategies for the impacts to areas and resources of strategic agricultural production.

Impact assessment in the approvals process should be accompanied by a significant increase in the proactive monitoring of compliance and resources condition by State and Federal jurisdictions. To date this work has been horribly under resourced and subsequently little can be done to proactively manage impacts.

QFF is particularly concerned to ensure that any planning approach address the needs of strategically important farming land to ensure that these lands can continue to make a significant contribution to regional economies and secure Australia's future needs for food. Agricultural production and processing are long-term commercial activities which require stable investment. The basic requirement is common for all industry and it must be supported by a secure and supportive policy and planning environment, which will enable investors to plan with confidence for their medium and long term operations. This is particularly important when considering the role of our industry in providing food, fibre and foliage for generations to come within an ever diminishing arable footprint that requires greater emphasis on investment in sustainability and efficiency.

QFF would be willing to provide further information or presentation to the Committee if required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Galligan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dan Galligan
Chief Executive Officer