

Submission to the Senate on the Impact of the Proposed Coal and Gas Mining on the Murray Darling River Basin.  
16th September 2009

We live on the driest continent on Earth. Australia is already on NASA's Desertification watch as its arable land ( a meagre 6% of the Australian landmass) and limited water resources come under further pressure from climate change, dry land salinity, urban development and unprecedented levels of mining. As a citizen of Australia, as a farmer on the Liverpool Plains, and a parent of four children, I am very concerned about the rapid expansion of the mining sector in Australia and our failure as a community to have provided adequate safeguards to protect our invaluable water resources, the natural environment and prime agricultural farmland. What future do we leave for our children to inherit?

I write to urge you to consider the potential impacts of current and future mining operations on all environmental values in the Murray Darling Basin, and in particular the potential impacts upon surficial and groundwater flows and quality in the alluvial flood plains at the headwaters in the Namoi Valley and the Darling Downs catchments. And I also urge the Senate to allow for the evaluation of the potential impacts of these mining operations in the context of the Murray Darling Plan and agricultural productivity. This is a critical issue of National significance I commend the Senate to put aside shortsightedness and party politics and act now to bring forward recommendations to protect our valuable land and water resources. Critical to the growth of our great nation to date has been the unique and valuable land and water resources of the Murray Darling Basin, before it is too late we need to act and implement changes to allow for the following proposals;

- (1) Stop the proposed coal mines at Caroona and Watermark on the Liverpool Plains. Prevent any further granting of coal and gas exploration licences in the Murray Darling Basin.
- (2) To provide for a fully independent Catchment wide water study of the entire Murray Darling Basin for both the above ground and below ground water supplies. Before any mining operations are approved.
- (3) To introduce Federal Legislation to protect our water systems both above and below ground from the short term destructive ventures such as mining.
- (4) To provide for new Legislation that protects and categories areas of prime agricultural farmland that protects it from mining and urban development.

Is the Senate aware that the State Governments of New South Wales and Queensland are set to allow for a huge expansion of the coal and gas industry in areas that directly affect the quality and water flows of the water systems of the Murray Darling Basin?

The CSIRO published a report into the state of the Murray Darling River system on 28 November 2008 and in it they outlined the condition of the river system as critical. The CSIRO report emphasises the need to plan for a new water management system to provide for secure, safe and reliable supplies of water as a resource for cities, towns , and irrigators. The report highlighted the fact that the river and groundwater was looked at and found to be over allocated and unsustainable.

As the Federal Government now has input into the water assets within the Murray Darling Basin and with release of the CSIRO report, surely control of such significant water supplies is no longer a State issue?

There is also a significant issue of diminishing sustainable farmland in the Murray Darling Basin and I urge you the Senate to act to prevent inappropriate coal and gas mining in the Murray Darling Basin, a highly productive food bowl.

The Garnaut Review on Climate Change makes it clear that State Premiers must recognise that continued economic growth is not sustainable and states that precedence must be given to the environment.

And as Dr James Hanson a leading NASA climate scientist wrote to the Australian Government in March 2008 calling for the phasing out of Australia's currently high coal exports in order to halt further damage to our global life support system.

I urge the Senate to act now on this issue of national significance, it is imperative that the Government be shown that they need to legislate to protect our valuable land and water resources of the Murray Darling Basin.

Given the urgency of these matters we would urge you to act now.

Yours Faithfully,

Catriona Simson.