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Secure, affordable fresh food for ALL Australians is seriously being compromised by the Federal and State Governments total lack of vision and initiative to legislate to protect our unique rich prime agricultural regions such as the Liverpool Plains in the NW of NSW.

Given that this vitally important food bowl is currently under threat from coal and coal seam gas mining we seek assurances that the Liverpool Plains will be quarantined as a food producing region critical to the future food security of this nation.

During the drought years between 2000-2008, the Liverpool Plains continued to produce food when many regions were unable to continue production due to the extreme dry climatic conditions and lack of water. Such is the unique nature of this region.

The reliability and diversity of production on the Liverpool Plains is due largely to the unique rich self-mulching basalt soils, particularly the black alluvial plains, which, along with the quality aquifers allowing for yields of 40% above the national average, enshrines this region as of strategic importance for our continued local and global food security.

Along with mining expansion throughout the country, foreign investors are also being encouraged to buy up huge areas of land. Add to this the impacts of urbanisation on land previously used for agriculture, global warming and climate change issues plus ever increasing expanding population growth globally, we clearly see that our governments face some challenging times ahead where visionary, tough decisions will be required.

The Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) has stated that it is at present possible for whole rural districts to be acquired

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by offshore investors WITHOUT any Australian government scrutiny or approval.

The FIRB are apparently only notified of agricultural land sales if individual property sales exceed \$231m or if land is brought by a foreign government.

Under the coalition foreign investment in agriculture, forestry and fishing averaged \$274m a year whereas under Labour it is \$2.7b annually.

I ask the obvious questions:-

1. Why has this been allowed to occur without suitable scrutiny?
2. How can the government legally and constitutionally sell land in this random manner?
3. Who exactly are the members on the FIRB and why have they not been given tighter regulations for land and water acquisition by foreign entities?
4. Why is it that other countries and their governments recognise the potential of agriculture and water acquisition as a sensible long term investment option, however, our own governments seem unaware of the highly valuable resources in their own back yard?
5. What will become of individual property rights, the continuation of a viable agricultural sector and the impact on the Australian economy if Australian land isn't protected for food?

With increasing foreign investment in food growing regions government policies need to urgently recognise the responsibility and unique position Australia faces globally in the food security debate and act to secure our agricultural regions as their number one primary responsibility.

There are no substitutes for food and water!!

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As responsible leaders of this wonderful country, your vision of a better future for ALL Australians must incorporate strategies for the expansion of food production and protection of vital clean water supplies.

I therefore call on the government to show planning for the future of this country by:-

- Setting aside and quarantining prime agricultural land and water from inappropriate development including coal and coal seam gas mining.
- Recognising that there ARE substitutes for energy production but not for clean food and water.
- Buying back the agricultural land that the Foreign Investment Review Board allowed to be sold to foreign governments for mining.
- Showing respect and due democratic process by consulting with the communities affected BEFORE any exploration licences are granted or land sold to foreign entities and accepting the will of the people in the decision making process.

On 10 Feb 2011 the Sydney Morning Herald printed an article titled, “Planning for Food or Coal?”

Here are some relevant extracts from this excellent thought provoking article.

Agriculture Always Comes Last

In any government development assessment, agriculture always comes last. Whether it be from the relentless call to expand urban sprawl to the inexorable march of tree changers to the miners of brown coal– the reality is that food production is under threat by all quarters.

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This surely, is simply not good enough for a forward looking progressive society.

What is happening here is that we have a NSW state Government that won't listen to anyone save for miners and developers. Not residents, not councillors and least of all farmers.

**What happens if we don't remedy this myopia soon?
What sort of legacy do we leave future generations?**

From:-
Mrs Sue Wilmott