

Submission to Inquiry into Food Production in Australia

To: Senate Select Committee on Agriculture and Related Industries

From: Jeff Bidstrup

Background.

I am a farmer on Queensland's Darling Downs with over 50 years farming experience. I farm an amalgamation of properties based in 2 locations 150 kilometres apart, with my two sons who are engineering and science graduates managing the respective operations growing grain, pulses, cotton, and cattle primarily.

I have been actively involved in industry organizations all my life, and recently retired after serving two 3 year terms as a director of the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, and retired after one term as a director of Cotton Seed Distributors, the farmer owned co operative with licence to sell CSIRO cotton varieties in Australia and worldwide, and the licence to use Monsanto and Bayer biotechnology in Australia.

I was also fortunate to be named the Australian Cotton Grower of the Year in 1999 and the Queensland Primary Producer Landcarer of the Year in the same year, and this year received the international Kleckner Trade and Technology Advancement Award for "exemplary leadership, vision and resolve in advancing the rights of all farmers to choose the technology and tools that will improve the quality, quantity and availability of agricultural products around the world."

Currently, I am National Convener of the Producers Forum, an Australia wide group whose aim is to ensure timely access to agricultural biotechnologies for the economic, social and environmental benefit of all Australians. Many believe our group played a pivotal role in repealing the moratoria in the eastern states.

I am also the Chair of the Haystack Road Coal Committee, a group set up to try to protect prime agricultural farmland from mining so that future generations in Australia and worldwide may have the benefit of stable food production.

My interest and comments stem from my involvement in the above groups.

Submission

Australia has been blessed with an abundant supply of food since a few years after our European settlement. We have never been subjected to famine or the possibility of it as has Europe during and after the last two world wars, and as does much of the world's population today.

This tends to make us blasé about the importance of food, and unfortunately many Australians disregard their international humanitarian obligations to those less privileged. Farmers like me are proud of their profession which produces abundant healthy food for our nation, with surpluses that help feed the world. Those who object to our profession and take a narrow view that we can either import our food, or should only use our agricultural resources to feed ourselves take a dangerously shortsighted view of food production for ourselves, our world neighbors and global peace.

In each of the last 7 years the world has consumed more grain than it has grown. This situation may be reversed in the short term, and indeed will need to be reversed, but the fact remains that we have only another 13 percent of the planet left that could be plowed if we totally disregarded greenhouse implications. We will need to grow as much food between now and 2050 as we have in the last 10,000 years according to a UN report.

At the recent World Food Prize Symposium in Des Moines in Iowa, USA, it was stated that we are at a watershed moment in world history where we will be united or divided depending on food policy and production and we will have world war or peace depending on food policy and production.

<http://www.worldfoodprize.org/symposium/2008/transcripts.htm>

Tony Burke, our Federal Agriculture Minister is quoted in The Sydney Morning Herald 20th November 2008: "There is something worse than having one GFC. That's having two. Amid the international response to the global financial crisis, many people have stopped talking about the other GFC: the global food crisis. This is the world's challenge: to produce more food, while combating climate change, dealing with increasing water scarcity and coping with financial crisis. This will be front-of-mind when the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation gathers this week in Rome. The crisis carries humanitarian responsibility and economic opportunity for food-exporting nations such as Australia. We need to respond in three ways: aid, technology transfer and increasing our productivity. ... it will be some time before the end of either GFC. But the decisions we take now, as a nation and as a planet, will affect the prosperity and livelihoods of all the world's citizens for decades to come." Attachment 1

It is predicted that there will be another population the size of China to feed on our doorstep in Asia before we reach peak population in 40 years time, and another population the size of China in the rest of the world in the same period. With their reasonable desire and aspirations to a better lifestyle and diet, this will mean an exponential increase in food production is required. With our proximity to Asia, we will be inexorably involved in the World Food Prize Symposiums "world war or peace" scenario with the attendant risks and opportunities.

Australians are bombarded with reports about climate change due to CO2 levels. We have been told that we will lose up to 35 percent of the Murray Darling foodbowl, and we may need to plant 10 percent of our farms to trees to offset CO2.

Australia has recently experienced a mining boom that is unprecedented in our history. We have had mining booms many times in our past, and the land still bears the scars of that activity. Many areas will never again produce any worthwhile produce.

However, in the past, these booms have been primarily confined to sub-prime land, and the long term effect is less on our future economy. We are now seeing the large mining companies taking licences to mine over our premium agricultural lands e.g Caroon NSW, Felton and Haystack Road Qld. There are many more areas where drilling is continuing, and it can be reasonably expected that coal mining is planned. The premium Jimbour and Pirrivan Plains in Qld are but two examples.

The Haystack area that is under Qld Mineral Development Licence 383 last year produced enough wheat to make 68 million loaves of bread, enough feed grain to make beef for sausages to go around Australia 1.5 times, enough barley to make 7 million stubbies of beer, etc, etc. All of this without irrigation.

We clearly need to protect our premium food producing lands as a matter of national importance not just for food security, but for national security. An underfed neighbor is going to be a discontented neighbor, and we saw last year and early this year just how quickly that can arise with the advent of food riots in 37 countries and food shortages in places that have never suffered before.

Australia desperately needs a national food production policy that determines whether we feel as a nation that it is appropriate, particularly in light of the above comments, that we sacrifice our best agricultural assets for a one off financial injection from mining activity.

Professor Julian Cribb who is a science communicator and Adjunct Professor of Science Communication at the University of Technology Sydney recently wrote: "This is not a challenge susceptible to "silver bullet" solutions, but will require action on a global scale and by every human and government on Earth. Nowhere have I yet seen signs that world leaders, or Australian leaders, appreciate the complexity and multifactorial nature of the challenge confronting us.Land degradation has not been assessed globally since 1992, but is known to have become much worse. The evidence is in the Aral Sea, the Sahel and the Murray-Darling Basin. As the World Bank's IAASTD report indicates, our present civilisation is not sustainable as it is supported only at the cost of the destruction of natural resources.

This situation heralds the real likelihood of regional and global instability. It is manifest in soaring food prices - international rice prices have risen from \$400 to \$1,000 a tonne - and food riots in 37 countries, in some of which there is high risk of government failure.

Sixty per cent of all conflicts in the past 18 years have been driven, at their core, by disputes stemming from a scarcity of food, land or water. These are major drivers of refugeeism and war. In 1850-52 a quarter of the population fled Ireland due to famine. By the 2020s looming regional food shortages could precipitate refugee waves numbering in the hundreds of millions, leaving no country on Earth unaffected.

....If we wish to avoid these wars, riots and refugee tsunamis, the only answer is to secure the food supply.

.... Australia has not yet understood that agriculture policy is defence policy. It is refugee policy, immigration policy and environmental policy, as well as health, food and economic policy. We persist in seeing it as an isolated and unimportant issue. We have not grasped its significance as the central issue of human destiny in the 21st century." Attachment 2

The Queensland Deputy Premier has stated at public forums in Dalby on 5th and 21st November 2008 that mining is a temporary land use. Unfortunately, at the same forums he has stated that mining and farming can co-exist. But when the land is taken out of production and then returned in a state many fold less productive, if productive at all, this is self evidently not the case.

At the Mining Summit in Dalby on 21 Nov 2008, the Deputy CEO of the Queensland resources Council, Greg Lane, stated that he was sure there was some mined land in Queensland that had been reclaimed to its previous status, but he was not sure where it was and what percentage of the mined area of the state was involved. He undertook to find out, and our group, the Haystack Road Coal Committee has written to him asking for details and the invitation to visit the site.

He also stated that the Hunter Valley had large areas reclaimed and farmers living happily with miners. Anecdotally, this is not the case, and a literature search reveals massive environmental degradation. The Queensland Country Life 27-11-08, p5 states in reference to Greg lane's claims, "While no one was on hand from NSW to challenge the remarks, the comments have been strenuously challenged this week by geochemist and physicist Dr Pauline Roberts. The NSW based scientist described the claims of rehabilitation in the Hunter Valley as 'a complete sham'. 'Anyone who drives through the Hunter Valley will see the large soil heaps, what they call overburden, which have been laden with superphosphates to get anything to grow on what is effectively broken down toxic rock,' Dr Roberts said. 'There is no natural drainage within these structures, they will take 50,000 years to settle, and you are looking at a desiccated and damaged environment that will be leaching sulphides and heavy metals into the environment for hundreds of years to come. .." Attachment 3

There has been much nebulous talk lately about a mine site in the US that has been reclaimed to better-than-previous status. It would appear that this is Peabody's Black Beauty mine at Sugar Ridge, Miller Creek, Indiana, USA. Although they do not disclose the depth of the coal, that area appears to have deposits from 0-12 metres, not the 100 metre deep deposits at Haystack Road. Sugar Ridge is 29 times smaller in area, 189 times smaller in deposit, and wind blown loams (loess) with no sodic or saline subsoils like haystack road.

Mining coal by any current technology entails removing the productive land of the tenement from its current level of productivity at any of the contentious above mentioned sites, and most likely at any site. The American experience of reclaiming shallow mines with less overburden is not relevant here, and it is indeed mischievous for those preparing to mine these sites to suggest otherwise.

The impact on food production will be significant and cumulative. It is relevant that these sites (Haystack, Felton, Caroon, now, with suggestions of Pirinuan, Jimbour, Brookstead, Bongeen, etc, etc) are our premium cropping areas, and the areas that have always produced even in national drought. It can be expected that with predicted climate change, they will, if allowed, continue to produce.

State Governments have repeatedly shown themselves to be unreliable and disastrously short sighted on the issue of agriculture. We have seen many states jump on the bandwagon of banning GM crops for no other reason than political expediency, when all the science pointed to its safety, and when we

continued to import significant amounts of GM food products and use GM cotton seed oil in nearly every fish and chip shop in Australia. This has created for Australian canola growers a vacuum of competitive technology compared to their global counterparts, and those in eastern Australia are just now beginning to enjoy access to that technology.

I am not a canola grower, but have seen first hand the massive benefits biotechnology has brought to the cotton industry. An 85 percent reduction in pesticide use is an undeniably good environmental outcome.

To underscore the states irresponsibility when it comes to planning, Queensland has in excess of 76 billion tons of coal that is recoverable with current technology, but the Queensland Government has issued itself a licence on Haystack Rd through its wholly owned Tarong Energy to apply for a mining licence. Tarong has stated they have no intention of mining or using the coal, but intend to sell the licence. It is difficult to see the difference between the government selling an asset like this and the government selling off the Great Barrier Reef to a multinational company for a short term gain.

The Deputy Premier stated at the Mining Summit in Dalby (21-11-08) that it would come at a cost if we were to protect premium agricultural land from mining, but every environmentally sustainable action we take comes at a short term cost. Replacing an incandescent bulb with an energy saving fluorescent bulb has a short term cost, our sustainable farming practices have a short term cost, and if saving our best food producing farmlands has a short term cost, then I believe society is in a frame of mind to pay that price for the benefit of having the option to keep producing food on that country. Attachment 4

It is obvious that if a mining operation cannot cost effectively rehabilitate prime farming land to its previous stature, that mining operation is receiving a subsidy from the people of the state to be allowed to mine and not leave the state's premium assets as they were when the mining began. No other industry, particularly one that exports most of its profits, and is a major greenhouse emitter, receives such a substantial subsidy. Farmers are required to work to a strict set of guidelines (tree clearing, water impoundment, water diversions, weeds, feral animals, erosion control, etc) so that the natural resource is kept secure for future generations, and any waiving of these obligations by the state is a subsidy.

It is often stated that mining and farming can co-exist, but intensive cropping and open cut mines cannot co-exist. It is misleading to suggest this, and it is misleading to suggest premium country like Haystack Road can be reclaimed to anywhere near its former quality.

Most coal in the sub prime areas is a little deeper and therefore a little more costly to mine. This is a small but worthwhile premium for society to pay to keep our best food production areas available for future generations, and one generation now is expected to be 100 years!

State governments have shown an inability to think in terms of more than a few years. They did nothing about water planning till we ran out, and they are doing nothing about food security. They seem unable to comprehend that the coal will still be there to be mined in 30 or 50 years time should we decide we no longer need food, but have a desperate need for coal.

The Queensland government has also shown it cannot satisfy any reasonable environmental concerns with the admission at a public meeting in Dalby on 2nd November 2008 by the Director of the EPA, Dr Ian Wilson, that the EMPs for the coal Seam Gas industry are a “gamble” and public statements by the Queensland Resources Council on ABC radio on 27th November 2008 that the planning in the Surat Basin is a mess and that we cannot “unscramble the egg.”

We need a national environmental policy to protect farmland when state governments cannot uphold their responsibilities. Otherwise, we will continue to lose premium farmland.

So, in the absence of any state planning, and because of the over-riding national interest in security and our humanitarian responsibilities to the other citizens of the globe, we desperately need a food production policy that protects premium agricultural country and guarantees that we will always have a surplus to provide our neighbors who are less fortunate, and will increasingly look to us to provide them with the food to sustain their increasing populations. Farmers see it as their obligation in society to provide plentiful safe healthy food, and our nation should see it as our obligation in the global village to provide our trading neighbors with food when they cannot themselves supply their own. It is the cheapest, best and most humane and moral way to ensure global security.

The Federal Government should use all its powers and persuasion to force the State Governments to rethink their mine at all costs policy, and implement a moratorium on all mining and development licences of premium agricultural farmlands till a national policy can be formulated.

Summary.

We need a national food production policy that identifies and protects premium farmland from mining

We need to consider our national security when developing a national food production policy.

We should consider our international moral and humanitarian obligations when developing the policy

The policy should identify and protect not only our premium agricultural soils, but communities and infrastructure that has been built up over decades

If mining companies cannot or are not required to leave the agricultural asset in the state they started with, this amounts to a massive subsidy by the state to the mining company. The people of the state will never be compensated for the loss of its agricultural jewels, and after peak food, the cost and subsidy will be seen as a failure in the chain of responsibility of the government, the mining companies, and the government department heads.

Subject to our world class GMO safety and regulatory authority approval, we need access to and encouragement of new GM crops and traits, particularly traits that will benefit Australian farmers more than their global counterparts. E.g. frost, salt tolerance.

We need a moratorium on mining or the issue of MDLs on premium lands till the national scheme can be instituted, or at least a national framework that binds the states to best practice management in land resource management and regional planning policies.

Finally, I am grateful for the opportunity to present this submission, and would also appreciate an opportunity to appear in person before the inquiry if that was appropriate.

Thank you for considering my submission,

Jeff Bidstrup

Attachments

1: Tony Burke comments, Sydney Morning Herald

2: Prof Julian Cribb. Online Opinion

3: Dr Pauline Roberts, Queensland Country Life, 27th Nov 2008

4: Farm protection 'at a price', Paul Lucas, Queensland Country Life, 27th Nov 2008



Attachment 1

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Food for thought as other crisis hits hard

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Tony Burke
November 20, 2008

There is something worse than having one GFC. That's having two. Amid the international response to the global financial crisis, many people have stopped talking about the other GFC: the global food crisis.

It is still with us and not hard to find, from food prices in supermarkets worldwide to hunger in the Pacific, Asia and Africa. There were food riots in Africa and South-East Asia this year, and the crisis was linked to the fall of the Haitian government. Unless its causes are dealt with, it will worsen in the years to come.

Those causes are not well understood. The view that it is simply because biofuels use food for fuel is wrong.

Biofuels policies may have made us reach the crisis more quickly but the long-term trends have shown that food demand has been catching up with supply over many years.

The reasons include the growing world population and lower average harvests affected by climate change.

The good news story that much of the developing world is becoming wealthier has brought new challenges. As people become richer, they demand more meat. This causes farmers to shift from cropping to grazing and producing food for livestock and people.

As many developing nations modernise their economies, the agriculture sector tends to come last, meaning countries undergoing massive urban expansion still practise subsistence agriculture.

This is the world's challenge: to produce more food, while combating climate change, dealing with increasing water scarcity and coping with the financial crisis.

This will be front-of-mind when the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation gathers this week in Rome.

As you would expect, none of the simple answers work.

Reversing biofuels policies in some parts of the world is not sufficient to offset long-term pressures on food supply. On its own, aid won't do the trick either. When aid is cash or food supplies, it can be counterproductive, causing the local market to crash and wipe out the livelihoods of local farmers.

The crisis carries humanitarian responsibility and economic opportunity for food-exporting nations such as Australia. We need to respond in three ways: aid, technology transfer and increasing our productivity.

The Government has allocated over \$100 million to improving global food security, including to the World Food Programme's emergency appeal.

Then you have the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, which fits the adage of teaching people to fish to feed them for a lifetime. By sending agricultural experts to nations such as East Timor and Vietnam, Australia is helping the poorest nations to come closer to feeding their own populations.

But the crisis is not only felt in developing nations. We've been seeing the effect at our checkout counters for many months. According to the FAO's Food Price Index, world food prices fell by 6 per cent in September, but were still 51 per cent higher than they were two years ago.

This drives home the pressures that pensioners, carers and working families started facing well before the global financial crisis hit.

The hardest part of the response is to produce more food. Much of our nation remains in its longest and deepest drought, and farm costs such as chemical, fertiliser and fuel have soared.

We need to do more to get our research and development from the lab to the farm, and find synergies between the pressures of climate change and increasing productivity.

Given the challenges the world faces, we cannot ignore the potential of genetically modified organisms. It has always been a sensitive issue and, as with all food technology, food-safety issues are paramount. While food safety may be a reason to ultimately reject particular plants, it is not a reason to reject the science of genetic modification.

When India switched to genetically modified cotton, it increased productivity by 75 per cent in four years. It went from a net importer of cotton to the world's second-largest exporter.

None of us know if such gains will come from other crops, but ignoring the potential of genetic modification puts superstition ahead of science.

It will be some time before the end of either GFC. But the decisions we take now, as a nation and as a planet, will affect the prosperity and livelihoods of all the world's citizens for decades to come.

Tony Burke is the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Attachment 2

ON LINE *opinion* - Australia's e-journal of social and political debate

Tackling the global food challenge

By Julian Cribb

Posted Thursday, 11 September 2008

World food security, as Australian consumers and others are fast discovering, is at its lowest in half a century. The precipitous fall in world food stocks in the past seven years is forewarning of what we can expect in the next few decades as civilisation runs low on water, arable land, nutrients and technology, as marine catches collapse, as biofuels grow and energy costs rise, and as droughts intensify under climate change.

The chart of grain stocks reveals that, year on year, humanity now consumes more food than it produces.

The reasons for this are straightforward:

- The human population is growing - towards 9.1 billion by 2050 - but demand for protein food, especially in China and India, is growing much faster. Total world food demand is forecast to rise 110 per cent by 2050.
- We are entering a global water crisis. Cities now take up to half of the water that was once used to grow food, while groundwater levels are falling in every country in the world where it is used for agriculture. The volume of fresh water available to grow food is now in decline.
- The global area of good arable land is now declining. We are building on it, eroding and degrading it, or locking it away in conservation reserves or for recreational purposes.
- We are losing nutrients - we apply about 150 million tonnes of elemental fertiliser to the world's farms every year, but lose an estimated 1,100 million tonnes of nutrients, through soil erosion and leaching. Yields are now falling in many countries.
- Up to half of farm produce is wasted during processing. Up to half the food in shops, restaurants and homes is thrown away. Almost all of the nutrients in our sewage systems are wasted.
- Biofuels are expanding into food production areas. At this rate, by 2020 we will be burning 400 million tonnes of grain a year - equal to the entire world rice harvest.
- There has been a decline in global scientific research to lift food production, in both developing and developed countries (including Australia) for 20 years.
- There is currently massive farm inflation in the prices of fuel, fertiliser and chemicals, pricing these out of the reach of poor and medium farmers.
- More than half of the world's major fisheries are in decline. Sea fishing is forecast to collapse by 2040, throwing more demand onto land-based food protein.
- The climate is changing. Modelling by the Hadley Centre in Britain suggests that up to half the Earth may be in regular drought by the end of the century.

The present challenge is thus to double world food output - using less land, far less water, far fewer nutrients and, with the prospect of less technology to do so, in the teeth of increasing drought.

This is not a challenge susceptible to "silver bullet" solutions, but will require action on a global scale and by every human and government on Earth. Nowhere have I yet seen signs that world leaders, or Australian leaders, appreciate the complexity and multifactorial nature of the challenge confronting us. Blaming biofuels or oil prices alone, as most commentators do, will not address all 10 critical factors listed above.

Land degradation has not been assessed globally since 1992, but is known to have become much worse. The evidence is in the Aral Sea, the Sahel and the Murray-Darling Basin. As the World Bank's IAASTD report indicates, our present civilisation is not sustainable as it is supported only at the cost of the destruction of natural resources.

This situation heralds the real likelihood of regional and global instability. It is manifest in soaring food prices - international rice prices have risen from \$400 to \$1,000 a tonne - and food riots in 37 countries, in some of which there is high risk of government failure.

Sixty per cent of all conflicts in the past 18 years have been driven, at their core, by disputes stemming from a scarcity of food, land or water. These are major drivers of refugeeism and war. In 1850-52 a quarter of the population fled Ireland due to famine. By the 2020s looming regional food shortages could precipitate refugee waves numbering in the hundreds of millions, leaving no country on Earth unaffected.

If we wish to avoid these wars, riots and refugee tsunamis, the only answer is to secure the food supply.

Australia has not yet understood that agriculture policy is defence policy. It is refugee policy, immigration policy and environmental policy, as well as health, food and economic policy. We persist in seeing it as an isolated and unimportant issue. We have not grasped its significance as the central issue of human destiny in the 21st century.

Thus, we have cut agricultural science for decades. At a time of global food crisis, CSIRO recently announced fresh cuts. University enrolments in this discipline are at record lows and most of our existing researchers are approaching retirement.

The fall in Australia's international standing in agricultural science is reflected the fact that we provided almost none of the 400 scientists asked by the World Bank to report on the challenges facing global agriculture. Only a decade or so ago we were world leaders in this field.

The solutions to this phase of the global food challenge are laid out in the IAASTD report, which Australia has refused to support (along with the US and Canada) because we did not like the claim that GM crops were not the "silver bullet" some insist them to be, especially for poor farmers. We are thus out of step with world scientific opinion about what needs to be done.

The scientific goals of the coming decade are clear, and I have outlined them in a longer paper, "The coming famine". They include:

- a 200 per cent increase in water use efficiency in all crops;
- a global effort to put organic farming systems on a scientific footing and exploit still-unknown soil biological processes;
- development of low-input farming systems that rely far less on oil-derived fertilisers, chemicals and energy;
- a global effort to recycle all nutrients on-farm, in the food chain and sewage works;
- a massive effort to raise vegetable production and consumption to replace protein and carbohydrate-based foods, using more than 1,000 species of "new" vegetables currently undeveloped in agriculture - this will also address the obesity pandemic;
- large-scale introduction of "green cities" (urban horticulture on buildings) and vegetable protein biosynthesis using recycled sewage nutrients; and
- development of farming systems, especially for the Third World, that protect native vegetation and biodiversity, cleanse water and sequester soil carbon.

These challenges are far from trivial. With its current depleted agricultural science effort and over-commitment to a single technology (GM), Australia is in a position to tackle few, if any of them.

Half a century ago we shouldered similar global responsibilities with great enthusiasm, skill and commitment - but that nation is no longer recognisable in today's apathetic mob of sybarites.

Just as humanity overcame two previous global food crises with the first agricultural revolution and the Green Revolution, it is now called on to do so again, with the sustainable food revolution. The effort required to launch this is far greater than indicated by the half-hearted response from out-of-touch governments at the recent Rome food summit.

First we must all be aware of - and, if possible, alarmed about - the position. Then, we must act. The issue of declining global food security is far more pressing than even climate change. It is the scientific challenge of the age.

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Professor Julian Cribb is a science communicator and Adjunct Professor of Science Communication at the University of Technology Sydney. He is a member of [On Line Opinion's Editorial Advisory Board](#).

D.C.L. 27.11.08

MINING industry claims that coal mines in NSW's Hunter Valley (pictured) have been effectively rehabilitated and successfully returned to agriculture have been ridiculed by an independent research scientist.

Queensland Resources Council deputy chief executive Greg Lane raised plenty of eyebrows at last week's mining summit at Dalby when he said that mining and agriculture co-existed happily in NSW's Hunter Valley, and that mines in the area had been successfully restored to productive agricultural land.

While no one was on hand from NSW to challenge the remarks, the comments have been strenuously challenged this week by geochemist and physicist Dr Pauline Roberts.

The NSW based scientist described the claims of rehabilitation in the Hunter Valley as "a complete sham".

"Anyone who drives through the Hunter Valley will see the large soil heaps, what they call overburden, which have been laden with superphosphates to get anything to grow on what is effectively broken toxic rock," Dr Roberts said.

HUNTER VALLEY:

Land rehabilitation claims rubbish

"There is no natural drainage within these structures, they will take 50,000 years to settle, and you are looking at a desiccated and damaged environment that will be leaking sulphides and heavy metals into the environment for hundreds of years to come.

"When they can get anything to grow on it they are heavily superphosphated, cattle are not kept on it for too long because obviously they are eating grass that is picking up toxic nutrients."

Dr Roberts said the problems in the region were due largely to a failure of the NSW Government to provide adequate resourcing to the Environmental Protection Agency in that State.

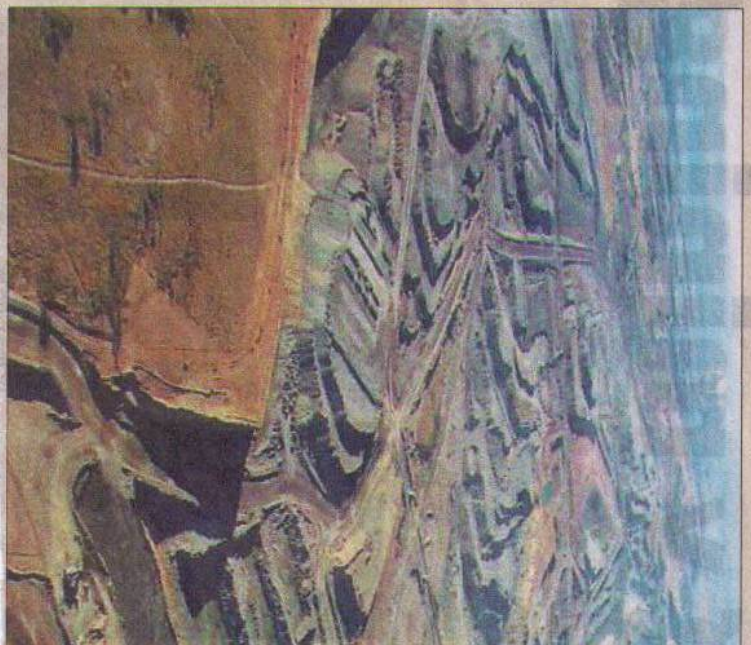
In some cases one EPA staff member in NSW was responsible for monitoring as many as 10 mines.

Dr Roberts described the failure of Governments to enforce adequate rehabilitation standards on previously mined land as an environmental disaster.

"You have just got to think about the process, you are disturbing something that nature put down there which does not support life, you bring that to the surface.

"It is never going to be top soil, it is never going to have natural drainage, and when water does get on it, it is an acid mine drainage, one of the biggest environmental disasters on the planet.

"In 50 years time we will look back and say what on earth have we done?"



Farm protection 'at a price'

QCL 27-11-08



Deputy premier Paul Lucas listens to a speaker during a mining summit at Dalby last Friday.

CALLS for prime agricultural land to be protected from coal mining will be considered by the State Government, but landholders have been warned that such measures could come at a price.

Deputy premier Paul Lucas told landholders at a mining summit at Dalby last Friday that the Queensland Government would seriously consider their requests to protect some areas of "iconic" farm land from mining developments.

But he added that landholders should realise that any form of protection would have other consequences.

"In certain parts of Queensland, people are saying to me, well why can't I divide my cane farm for residential housing?"

"Well, if it was iconic land, it would be a bit hard to say one moment you want to protect it for food production, and then for a different use.

"It is often better to have a degree of flexibility, however, people have legitimately and in good faith made suggestions and they deserve the Government to seriously consider them so that's what we will do."

One sticking point on the issue of protection relates to the question of how prime agricultural land is defined. Mr Lucas said there was clearly no universal agreement yet but said farmers at Dalby had presented him with some good ideas to get the ball rolling.

The depth of feeling surrounding the impact of mining on agriculture was reflected in the size of the crowds that arrived to meet with the deputy premier at both forums last week.

At Dalby organisers put out 150



By **JAMES NASON**
in Brisbane

(07) 3826 8200

chairs but at least another 100 people filled the standing areas at the rear of the room.

However, despite the heated nature of concerns, the deputy premier praised the constructive manner in which attendees expressed their views.

"I was very pleasantly surprised in both the forums I have done," Mr Lucas

Dalby summit back on track

COMMENT: MARK PHELPS

IT took AgForce's Brett DeHayr to get last Friday's Queensland Government organised Mining Summit in Dalby back on track.

After the crowd of about 300 packed into the Dalby RSL, the chief executive officer of Queensland's peak broadacre lobby group AgForce made the simple, but telling, opening to his address.

"I want to acknowledge the people who have an attachment to this land," Mr DeHayr said, "the current landholders and the original indigenous people."

In two sentences he cut through the political correctness and sugar coating to reveal the real conflict between established agriculture and the development of Queensland coal and gas industries.

said.

"There are a lot of very contentious issues here, but they have been dealt with in a spirit of goodwill and atmosphere.

"We all know there are problems, the real test of people is when they offer solutions, and there have been a number of suggestions made by all parties.

"Governments are elected to make decisions that may not be popular with everybody, but one of the best things we can do is to engage with people and listen to them.

"You mightn't be able to give some one 100pc of what they want, but there are certainly common issues along the way, and there has been a lot of intelligent and really sensible contributions."

He said that needed to be addressed in three key areas:

- Government enforcement of resource related activities.
- Appropriate compensation.
- Protection of prime agricultural land.

For the first time on the day, a speaker appeared to have a firm grasp of the challenges and the disruption being caused by the rapid development of Queensland coal and gas industries.

Most importantly, he recognised the importance of farmers.

It was in marked contrast to Greg Lane, the speaker from the Queensland Resources Council, who drew the anger of the crowd when he suggested many landholder complaints were little more than "war stories" promoted by the media.