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Sen Hon W Heffernan  
ELECTORATE OFFICE

9 March 2009

Dear Senator Heffernan,

RE: Mining resources boom in prime agricultural regions and it's impact on our environment, water, future food security, health and rural communities

I am writing to convey my deep concerns regarding the mining resources boom and the effects it is having on prime agricultural land and our future food security throughout Australia.

I live on a property on the Liverpool Plains in NSW where we grow wheat, sorghum, oats, barley, chickpeas, sunflowers and canola and fatten beef cattle.

The Liverpool Plains is one of the richest agricultural regions in Australia, if not the world. It's premium soil, water and climate offer unparalleled production opportunities.

The soils are exceptional as they are fertile volcanic soils with a high water holding capacity capable of producing summer and winter crops (3 crops in 2 years is not unusual).

The Liverpool Plains yields 40% above the National Average (ABARE) and contributes \$332 million annually to GDP from our top 5 agricultural commodities alone (cattle, cereals, sorghum, wheat, cotton and barley) (NAMS).

We have reliable summer and winter rainfall and the region is rarely drought-affected. Unlike many rural communities over the past decade, we have continued harvesting our crops throughout the years while many regions have endured crippling droughts and have not been able to harvest at all. Such is the priceless nature of this prime agricultural region.

When one considers arable land in Australia is less than 6% and prime agricultural land is only a fraction of this arable total, legislation needs to exist to safeguard areas such as the Liverpool Plains and the Breeza Plains for our future food security.

ABARE has predicted that export earnings for farm commodities will be around \$32 billion in 2009-2010. With the global financial crisis worsening these increases in rural exports are greatly assisting Australia economically and will continue to do so into the future if agricultural land is safeguarded for food production.

Like many other rural women and communities in recent years, we live with not only the constant extremes of changing climatic conditions but more recently, the new threat of large mining companies coming into our communities and onto our properties to commence mining exploration for coal and methane gas deposits. The Liverpool Plains is not alone in this struggle of mining versus agriculture on prime agricultural land. The Darling Downs in Queensland, Gloucester, Mudgee and the Hunter Valley in NSW are just a few areas facing the same issues.

I feel the biggest threat to agriculture and our food supply in the foreseeable future in Australia is not only climate change issues but the Government's shift, from valuing and preserving our rich productive agricultural lands for food production to chasing the dollar of the mining resources boom without adequate thought and consideration as to the risks involved. There seems to be a coal and gas "rush" without any measured and considered debate as to the costs of this exploration on our environment, water resources, health and future food security.

Agriculture is a renewable industry and can exist for future generations whereas mines have a limited mine life and often leave behind a legacy of problems associated with land degradation, contaminated water supplies plus many ongoing health issues for rural communities. Therefore, the Government needs to recognise the most valuable resources we have are our soil and water and legislate to protect these highly productive regions from any coal or gas mining.

When one considers that in the last 7 years the world has consumed more grain than its farmers have been able to produce and grain levels are at the lowest levels in the last 50 years with the total world food demand forecast to rise to 110% in the next 40 years, I feel we have to act now to ensure the future national and global food resources are assured.

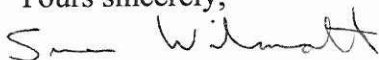
On behalf of all country communities faced with the threat of mining on prime agricultural land, I ask all Federal Senators

**1. to recognise our soils and water resources as a National Asset**

**2. to legislate to protect Australia's prime agricultural land.**

I urge all who have an influence in making decisions and developing policies regarding the future of agriculture in Australia today and into the future, to take this urgent action now before it is all too late.

Yours sincerely,



Sue Wilmott