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23 MAR 2009

Sen Hon
ELECTOR

The Senators
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT
2600

11-3-09

Dear Mr Heffernan,

I am writing to you about the grave concern I have for Australia's food security. Less than 6% of Australia's land is arable. Food security is about protecting this land. Urban sprawl was seen as the major threat to prime agricultural land, but now it is under a much more serious threat, coal and gas mining. Not only does this mining use valuable hectares, it destroys underground water aquifers, (crucial for irrigation, livestock and domestic use), and it produces highly toxic acid-mine waste which pollutes water courses, soil and the air we breathe. You only have to look at the decline in milk production in the Hunter Valley in NSW to see that mining and agriculture don't go.

One particular area of prime farming land that is under threat from both coal and gas mining is the renowned Liverpool Plains in northern NSW. According to ABARE, crop yields here are consistently 40% above the national average. Not only does it produce more tonnage, it grows a wide variety of crops, due to the reliable summer and winter rainfall this area receives. The Liverpool Plains contributes at least \$332 million to Australia's GDP from our five major commodities alone, (wheat, barley, sorghum, beef and cotton). As the climate and soils are so versatile we also produce many other commodities; maize, canola, chickpeas, soybeans, mungbeans, pigs/lamb/turkey and wool to name a few!

Not only does this region boast such diversity of food production it is also provides food security. Whilst Australia suffered one of the worst droughts in history, (and much of NSW is still in drought), the Liverpool Plains was still able to produce grain and meat. This was due to high water holding capacity of the soils, the region still receiving effective rainfall and the area's high quality underground water aquifers for irrigation. Not only does the Liverpool Plains provide a regular quantity of food due to the reliability of the area, its renowned, rich volcanic soils also assure us of high quality food. Kellogs actually prefer this region's grains for their Nutrigrain products. The food produced on the Liverpool Plains contains high grade proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Compare this to what coal has to offer; cyanide, halides, sulphides, heavy metals (lead, mercury, arsenic, cadmium), radioactives, carcinogenic benzenes etc. There are no prizes for guessing which industry will provide Australia with food security in the future!

In 2000 my husband won a Nuffield Farming Scholarship and travelled overseas studying climate change. He met with many leading scientists in this field, most of who said Australia would definitely get drier and experience more droughts, however they believed northern NSW and southern QLD would be less affected. It is absolutely imperative that we protect these regions if we are serious about Australia's food security.

Food security is already becoming of increasing importance and will continue to do so in the future. According to Julian Cribb of UTS, grain reserves are at their lowest levels in 50 years and in the last 7 years the world has consumed more grain than farmers have been able to produce. The world food demand is forecast to rise to 110% in the next 40 years, add to this the world's major fisheries collapsing by 2040, putting even more demand onto land-based farming. We simply cannot afford to lose prime agricultural land to mining outdated, un-environmentally friendly energy sources.

We are calling for a major overhaul of Australia's mining legislation. We want the Australian government to legislate to protect prime agricultural land, it needs to be treated as a national asset. The federal government is already moving to protect the supplies of the Murray Darling Basin, we want this protection to extend to prime agricultural land. Since the Liverpool Plains is the definition of prime agricultural land it is imperative that coal and gas mining are not allowed here if we are to be assured of Australia's food security in the future.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours Sincerely,



Martine Traill.
(Member of SOS Liverpool Plains)
www.ccag.org