

Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald
PO Box 2185
Townsville QLD 4810

March 8, 2009

Dear Senator Macdonald,

I am writing to you about an issue which is close to my heart but also has enormous ramifications for the whole of Australia.

I write to you in your capacity as a Senator of the Australian Government, which in that capacity lies a responsibility to make the right decisions for the long term benefits of all Australians.

I write to you as member of a third generation farming family on the beautiful fertile Liverpool Plains in Northern NSW and am hugely concerned about the future ability of this country to feed our ever growing population.

The State Labor Government granted an exploration license for coal to BHP, in April 2006, on the Liverpool Plains, known as Caroon Coal. The granting of this exploration license has dismayed the community and led to the forming of an action group to look into the bigger issues (www.ccag.com.au). We all know that once an exploration license is granted, the next step is a full scale mining operation. The local farming community are concerned that this planned development would threaten our precious water resources, our fertile and productive floodplains. We are not anti-mining but we believe that there should be areas set aside as crucial food security zones.

Australia's arable land amounts to around 6% of the total, prime agricultural land amounts to much less than that. It makes no sense to me that the Government should be issuing mining leases in areas classified as prime agricultural and putting the ability of this nation to feed itself at risk. The reason the Liverpool Plains is valued so highly is because of its rich volcanic soils which have high water holding capacities making this area basically drought proof. These soils allow the production of both winter and summer crops and throughout the recent drought years the Liverpool Plains have consistently produced when other marginal areas have failed.

Looking into the Senates food inquiry, I have read that the inquiry would “explore ways to secure Australia’s future food security”. I know one way to help realise this goal, the Government needs to put proper legislative safeguards in place to protect our prime agricultural land. We need these lands to be recognised and treated as the national asset that they are and we need to put measures in place to protect them from flawed state planning laws. We need to send the message that it is not OK for the State Government to just pocket the millions of dollars for these licenses without anyone being held accountable for damage done to our water resources or our productive agricultural land.

There are many areas that would welcome mining developments with open arms, the Liverpool Plains is not one of them. We already have sustainable industries that will support our communities and the wider Australian community for many years to come.

I implore you to help us, we cannot afford to allow the short-sightedness of the NSW Labor Government to send us all down the river. We can’t afford to allow them to force us to rely on imported food products of which the nutritional value and safe consumption of, cannot be assured.

On behalf of the constituents that you represent, I ask you to act wisely and with foresight to ensure a safe Australia for us all.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lisa Barber".

Lisa Barber