

Submission to Senate Enquiry into Food Production in Australia

I welcome this opportunity to speak to the Senators on the select committee for food security, on some very special issues. Special in terms of local and issues as all encompassing the terms of reference laid down by this committee in the enquiry into food production within Australia.

The people I come from are based both on the Liverpool plains and its surrounding Ridges. They are located on some of the richest and most diverse agricultural land in Australia. They are nurtured by a predominantly long-settled culture, indigenous, squatting, settlers, graziers, farmers and irrigators. The soils are black self-mulching clays interspersed by red conglomerate and back basalt, pine and box, wattle and gum ridges. The watering systems of this geographic region are unique in terms of the total geographic formation. Creeks and streams *rise* and flow to the north in an arc from the Liverpool ranges to the plains to the west of Narrabri. They fall into creeks of Yarraman, Warrah and Coxs then to the rivers the likes of the Mooki, Namoi.

Transecting this catchment basin is Lake Goran which catches and fills an area of 9000 hectares in times of significant rainfall events. This system all flows to the northwest, eventually to the western reaches of the Darling and then into the Murray. The waters that are left behind infiltrate into the ground and nurture the wonderful and valuable aquifers that set this area apart, making words such as those used in your terms of reference most importantly, those being *food, affordability, sustainable, production, impact* the language we speak and the culture we are a part of. We are capable both by geographics and education to make those terms both relevant and achievable.

Take the word affordable.

It means to have means, to be rich enough, to manage, to spare, yield and supply (1974, The Concise Oxford Dictionary, University Press). Our soils and their environment give this area this opportunity. The methods of farming here have been refined and redefined to allow for a minimum of intrusion by reducing our method of soil disturbance to nil.

We chose seeds of high standard and vigour, we leave our stubble after harvest to minimise the soils exposure to the elements and conserve our precious moisture, while using technologies to reduce the impact of compaction to our soils by 82%. Our systems are based on the underlying principle of conservation and sustainability.

Irrigation is undergoing the transition from flood to overhead lateral on pivot systems, fuel consumption at every level has been reduced. Yield records are logged 20 times per second in association to GPS location to allow our managers to make objective and informed decisions concerning future applications of seed, fertiliser and spray.

Location is important. Our towns provide service industries, our produce: meat, fibre, grains travel by road and rail (when available) to every seaport. Storage on farm has risen dramatically. Feedlots and poultry outlets abound. Tier-upon-tier of prosperous, economic integrated farming practice is undertaken in the region to produce value added, affordable

quality grain, meat, fibre, oil and pulses to the consumer. The consumer is recognised as the user of an article, as apposed to the producer, who requires things to satisfy human wants and needs, such as food and clothing.

We now move in this situation to the point of crisis, impact and collision...

By reason of economic development and income growth in parts of the Asian and Indian continent, another resource within our region has been recognised as being highly valuable and that is coal. Exploration Licence 6505 was procured for in excess of \$100,000,000 by BHP Billiton to explore what is called the Caroona Basin, and a further \$300,000,000 provided to the State by a Chinese government registered company called Shenhua, to explore Watermark, a locality near the village of Breeza. The Caroona lease covers an area of 377 square kilometres while the Watermark covers a further 197 square kilometres. Overlaying these coal exploration areas are also significant gas exploration leases.

If these exploration leases are fully explored and suitable coal reserves located, there is then planned an inevitable outcome, production of coal to such a degree it would **rival** the gold rush of the early days of the colony. **One expert** has even quoted a coal train would be moving down the rail line to Newcastle (and **appreciate** each coal wagon carries between 45 and nearly 100 tonnes and at present each convoy represents 72 wagons) every eleven minutes for the next lifetime and then some, of every person in this room. Please take these statistics to heart, for the very core of this measured development is to change forever, and that is not an idle observation, the heartland of food production on these Liverpool agricultural regions.

We have been encouraged to believe that developments of this type will not have significant impact on our ability to produce food. Apart from the fact that the Caroona basin is thought to have 500,000,000 tonnes and Watermark 400,000,000 of coal reserves, if your refer to the map of the Namoi catchment which I have included, you will see that such huge coal development will stranglehold the upper reaches of this catchment. These proposed developments figure predominantly in those areas between Quirindi and Breeza, referred to as Upper Catchment 7 and Lower 8 in Appendix A (Ref.1), a longwall nearer Caroona and an open cut along the ridges near Breeza.

I point out to you that no one fully understands the interconnectivity of water between the ridges and the plains, hence the concentrated pressure for a water study to be undertaken by an independent body before mining is allowed to proceed, but we do fully realise there is no future for our sustainable farming practices or our ability to maintain a farming or grazing people if those very waters are interfered with, reduced or compromised by such extensive coal development, be it longwall or open cut, our waters, our soils, our whole cropping culture, all are at great risk!

A medium projection by the United Nations gave a 1950's projection of a hectare of arable land available on a per capita basis. By 2050, based on a 9.2 billion world population, less then 0.16 of a hectare per capita would be available. Here we are in prime agricultural areas with the requirements of sustainability, soil, clean air, nutrients, water and a clever, dedicated people about to include an industry in this area which will have dire consequences.

Some 400 million to 800 million new *middle class* in India and China alone are anticipated, with an extra 77 annual million increase in the world population over the next 2 generations. While we reduce the land and its production! These people will have new emphasis on food, feed, grain. Our area alone produces 40% above the national annual average of tonnes per hectare, I am quoting ABARE's 5 year average statistics between 2004 and 2008. We are capable of 2 crops a year winter and summer, if we lose our cropping potential and we will, it will be a serious blow to international and world markets, for not only will the grain reserves be affected, but the enormous skills and technology that has maintained this huge agricultural production area are at risk of dispersion to be replaced by the transience of the historic, nomadic mining industry and conglomerate ownership by default! Let us not forget your use of the word of *impact*, which means striking or collision, this development will certainly have this effect on the environment as well.

The people here have invested in land which promises sustainable food for the future, they have educated, they have adapted, they are a serious-minded people, they take themselves, their future, their businesses, very seriously but at the moment they are in crisis, not a global food crisis that is yet to come, not a climate crisis, that will yet be an outcome, but a philosophy that regards the non-sustainable energy push, which in the end takes no prisoners by reason of legislation and direction, as the future for these highly productive lands, a direction which unless people like yourselves take notice, can only result in non-affordability of food for consumers, non-viability of production by farmers and of an unsustainable nature of impact on the environment.

We ask you to take from your visit to this community, an awareness, that we are not of a mindset that other industries do not have a right to be considered in the full and complete development of a nation, but we wish you to be aware that we belong to a small, unique *niche* which, by any world standard of food production, through our soils and waters should be regarded as a National Treasure, because, I can assure you, this is how other nations perceive these Liverpool regions of ranges and plains.

I thank you for this opportunity to make this submission.

Patricia Duddy

References

1. Appendix A: Namoi Ground Water Map.pdf from the Terms of Reference for the proposed Namoi Catchment Water Study.