

# Australian Greens Additional Comments

The Australian Greens welcome this report, which clearly validates the warnings raised by Darling Downs and Surat Basin communities at the epicentre of the conflict between resource extraction and farming.

The section titled '*A need for reform?*' is focused on the urgency of regulatory reform. Overall, what the committee learned in this inquiry is that tightening the regulations on a case by case basis – while essential – does not address the question of whether the short term benefits of coal mining on productive farmland outweigh the long-term costs of compromised land, damaged aquifers and reduced food security.

The Australian Greens believe that leaving the determination of such issues to Environmental Impact Assessments undertaken by State Governments is manifestly unsustainable and will in short order lead to the irreversible destruction of some of Australia's prime farming country.

The case for direct Commonwealth intervention is clearly made in the majority report, but the recommendations fail to reflect this fact. The Australian Greens believe that it is appropriate for the Commonwealth to apply a threshold test under the *Water Act 2007* to determine whether or not mining or resource extraction should be prohibited in a given area.

The Commonwealth reserves the right to assess and, if necessary, block development projects if their impacts on matters of national environmental significance breach legislative thresholds. It is the view of the Australian Greens that similar tests must apply in the case of irreversible damage to water resources or destruction of prime farmland. Arguments as to the constitutional ambiguity of the Commonwealth's powers to apply such a test should be a spur to clarification, rather than a deflection of the Federal Government's responsibilities in this regard.

We therefore propose the following recommendations as a complement to those in the majority report:

- 1. The constitutional heads of power under which the Commonwealth Government may intervene directly to prevent mining and extractive industries in prime farmland should be clarified as a matter of urgency.**
- 2. Amend the Water Act 2007 to prohibit the licensing of mining and extractive industries where they will have adverse impacts on groundwater resources and the environment.**

The Australian Greens would like to record our thanks to the community groups who gave evidence during the committee's hearings in Gunnedah and Oakey.

**Senator Scott Ludlam**  
**Australian Greens Senator for Western Australia**