

Submission to Inquiry into the impacts of mining in the Murray Darling Basin

To: Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts

From: Nigel Cox

Background

I am a fifth generation graingrower living on the black soil plains in the Murray Darling Basin. I live in the Haystack Plain area of the Darling Downs which is also part of the Surat Basin. I am also a qualified practising fitter and turner and work locally.

Submission

Any mining on the floodplains of the Haystack area of the Darling Downs would destroy the productivity of the country which with a .02degree of slope cannot afford disruption. This country is a floodplain with soils designed to retain water as it flows across in wet times. The soils do this magnificently and have managed to produce crops for many years without benefit of irrigation. The waters spread evenly over this country and erosion is not a problem.

Of great concern is the detrimental effect of mining on the underground aquifers. There is no way of telling what the long term results of disturbing these aquifers will be. Too often what appears to be safe, with time has proved to be wrong and it is only time that will tell. We cannot afford to take the gamble. Underground aquifers are the lifeblood of many communities, particularly so to the west of the Great Dividing Range.

The re-injection of salt back into the ground is of particular concern with coal seam gas and the salt "ponds" above ground for storage should be questioned deeply. When we have floods or a break in the dam wall we will have widespread damage to the environment which has the potential to be felt right through the Murray Darling River system destroying one of our very significant foodbowls.

The diversion of flood waters around mining activities on a flood plain can only cause huge problems for the surrounding farming areas thereby reducing their productivity. The Haystack Plain is one of the very few areas in Queensland that has inherently fertile soil and is one of our main food producing areas. There is nothing to be gained by mining the plain and the loss of productivity forever cannot be justified. The rehabilitation of country such as this has never been done and with that in mind, to restore it to anywhere near its present production levels would be untenable.

In 12 months alone, on the Haystack Plain, without any irrigation, we have grown enough wheat for 68 million loaves of bread, enough sorghum for 14 million chickens or 79 million beef sausages, enough malting barley for 7 million stubbies of beer as well as thousands of tonnes of edible chickpeas and mung beans amongst other specialty crops. We have also produced enough cotton for 675 thousand pairs of

jeans. For a relatively small area, these figures cannot be ignored and should not be removed from future productivity. Worldwide food production in the next 40 years needs to equal what we have produced in the last 10,000 years and as worldwide arable land is lost to urban encroachment, mining and degradation and land is being used for reafforestation we can ill afford to lose parts of the Murray Darling Basin to short term mining.

As Premier Bligh has said we have 300 years supply of coal in Queensland, it stands to reason that we should leave our best country until last and mine those areas where the impact is least.

Summary

There should never be any question about mining our very productive and viable food production areas. Only 2% of the Queensland comes under this description and the Darling Downs of the Murray Darling Basin is a major contributor. We can procure coal in many far less agriculturally important areas where the stimulus of mining would be of benefit. Our best farming areas should be protected for the future of Australia.

Thankyou for reading my submission.