



From the Mayor's Office

Cr Robyn Faber
Narrabri Shire Council
46-48 Maitland Street
PO Box 261
NARRABRI NSW 2390
Ph: (02) 6799 6833 Fx: (02) 6799 6888
Email: council@narrabri.nsw.gov.au

File Reference

RAF:EL ; C10/28003

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment
Communication & Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

17th September 2009

eca.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Submission to the Senate Inquiry into impacts of mining on water in relation to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan

Council considered a submission to the Senate Inquiry into impacts of mining on water in relation to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan at its Ordinary Meeting held Tuesday, 15th September 2009.

Narrabri Shire has always been a major area for **agricultural production** including:

- beef, lamb and pork production including breeding and animal husbandry;
- grains, legumes, wool and cotton production including breeding and research;
- vegetable production;
- agricultural processing including oilseeds processing, pasta production, flour milling, export packing, and consumer products including cosmetics and gourmet foods.

There is a large percentage of **businesses** established in the Shire to **support the agricultural industries** and the **processors of agricultural products**.

The unique nature of some agricultural production, such as cotton and **agricultural research**, also forms a base for a **strong tourism sector** in the Shire.

Potential also exists for production of crops for ethanol and other forms of bio-diesel fuels.

The Namoi Valley has a **well-developed and efficient irrigation farming sector** which is being seriously impacted by government policies to reduce water allocations, both surface and groundwater, as part of climate change response and environmental outcomes for the Murray-Darling Basin.

Resource extraction developments are emerging with the following **minerals and gas under extraction or development**:

-
- coal, both open cut and underground extraction;
 - coal-seam gas extraction;
 - infrastructure utilising coal seam gas, such as power stations;
 - exploration for both coal and coal seam gas.

These developments have water needs, resulting in increased competition with the agricultural sector for reducing water allocations.

They also produce water from coal seams which after proper treatment can return water back into the Valley for recycling by the resource extractors, utilisation for agricultural production or return of treated water to the Namoi River as environmental flow.

Narrabri Shire has 3 well established urban communities at Boggabri, Wee Waa and Narrabri which all rely on bores accessing the groundwater aquifers.

As population grows to support the new extractive industries, demands on groundwater for domestic use will add competition to the water available under the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Potential impacts on water in the Valley, additional to demand for a finite resource, include possible contamination from

- leachate through stockpiles of coal and overburden (surface);
- unplanned intrusion into aquifers during gas exploration drilling;
- unplanned intrusion into aquifers during underground coal mining;
- release of untreated water into the catchment (surface);
- depletion of aquifers by over extraction during mining or agricultural production;
- diversion of natural and underground water flows affecting use by existing agricultural producers.

Council draws the attention of the Inquiry to the provisions of the NSW State Groundwater Quality Protection Policy and the National Water Quality Management Strategy aimed at protecting the quality and quantity of water for all uses within NSW and especially the Murray-Darling Basin. These provisions must be reflected in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority is still developing the Basin Plan.

There is no doubt that the Basin Authority will impose limitations on water usage in the Namoi Valley as part of its Plan, possibly beyond the reduction to 86% of 2009/10 usage by 2015/16.

The **issues** for the Namoi Valley and Narrabri Shire are basically:

- Ensuring there is **adequate water** for all industries to operate, taking into account the cumulative impacts of each water user on the surface and groundwater availability.
- Protecting limited water resources from **contamination** from all perceived sources.
- Requiring **policy** makers and legislators to identify and properly consider the **impacts** their policies and laws relating to water will have on the productivity and well being of communities in the Shire by use of a living socio-economic model.
Note that the Water-Working Group of the Namoi Regional Organisation of Councils has made a submission to the Federal Government under the Strengthening the Basin Communities Program for funding to have NATSEM produce the model for the Namoi Valley.
- Requesting the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, and Governments, to ensure that the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is equitable. Council is particularly concerned at the proposed extra 5 year 'honeymoon' period which Victoria will appear to enjoy before compliance with increased water controls under the Scope of the Basin Plan

In Summary, Council is concerned about the cumulative impacts of mining and agriculture, competing for water resources which are being restricted by government policies without proper regard for the socio-economic outcomes of the developments and the policies. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan **MUST** address these issues and provide strategies which will underpin sustainable growth for our region.

Yours sincerely



Cr Robyn Faber
MAYOR