

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Impact of Mining on the Murray Darling Basin
As a farmer, agricultural scientist, wife and mother living in the Felton Valley, I am appalled that our farming community has to fight to prove to the Government that mining in the Felton Valley is NOT in the best interest of Queenslanders. I am horrified that areas such as Haystack Road, the Jimbour Plain and the Liverpool Plain too, have to prove their worthiness to continue feeding Australia and the World's growing population. Mining must be stopped in closely settled, food producing areas where there is potential for significant damage to the environment as mining these areas is NOT in the best interest of ALL Australians.

We must protect our River Systems

What will be the fate of runoff water? The proposed mine development at Felton is, at its closest point, only 700m from Hodgson Creek, 15km upstream of its junction with the Condamine River at the headwaters of the Murray Darling River System. A 30m high levee bank will be built 150m from the creek to protect the mine site from creek flood waters, but this in itself will act as a huge dam wall collecting runoff water from the surrounding slopes and mine infrastructure. The company plans to use this water, however, in times of intense rainfall events, the mine site may need to be dewatered, but where to? One would hope that Hodgson Creek is not seen as an easy option.

Impact on local aquifers The mining of the hills at Felton will intersect ground water that is critical for both human and livestock consumption. It is also recognised that the Basalt hills are significant recharge areas for the aquifers in the valley. Ongoing work by the Department of Natural Resources also identifies significant interactions between surface water in the creek and ground water in the surrounding valley. It is therefore highly likely that if the aquifers in the uplands are affected by the actions of mining, so too could flows in Hodgson Creek.

We must protect our Land Resource

The very act of mining is exploitive in nature whereas farming practices need to be nurturing and protective, to ensure the long term sustainability of the enterprise. The Felton Valley and Brigalow Jimbour Floodplain have been recipients of millions of dollars of environmental funding over the past decade. It seems ludicrous that areas that have been deemed worthy of protecting and fostering by our Government are now fighting for their very existence.

The productivity of floodplains such as the Jimbour Plain is highly dependent on the absence of barriers that restrict or alter the movement of overland flow water. The presence of mining operations, either open cut or long wall, will place restrictions on this water flow, potentially causing significant erosion events and degrading the land resource.

We must protect our Food Production

Direct impacts The proponents at Felton claim that they will not affect the food producing capability of the valley, because they are mining the ridges and not the valley floor. These ridges however produce significant quantities of eggs and beef – still very important in food security.

Indirect impacts The impact of dust and mine pollutants on horticultural production areas, 15km to the North and East of Felton will have significant impacts on the viability of these operations. A balloon released at Felton was found at Maryborough, 300km away, highlighting the distance coal dust could move. The massive release of Carbon Dioxide

from the mining and processing operation will have direct impacts on our nation's production of greenhouse gases. This comes at a time when farmers are facing incredible challenges with weather variability and our government is making great promises for emission reduction.

We must protect our Ecological Biodiversity

The mine at Felton has the potential to impact on a number of rare and endangered species. While the mining areas currently seeking approval stop short of a mapped endangered ecosystem, the full extent of the coal resource shows future mining operations working right through this area. Any activity that plans for massive alteration of the landscape will have dramatic effects on the dynamics of the environment. These effects can't be fixed by a promise to "rehabilitate to better than pre-mining condition".

We must protect our Communities

Above all else in the debate between mining and agriculture is the need to protect our communities.

Felton is a very closely settled area (700 residents within a 12 km radius of the mine site) and highly regarded for its beauty, serenity and proximity to larger service centres. Unfortunately, it is this last point (proximity to larger service centres/or infrastructure) that makes mining an attractive proposition in areas like Felton and the Liverpool Plains. Like Felton, Jimbour, Haystack and the Liverpool Plains were early settled areas, with some farms being in the same family for six generations. It seems ludicrous that the heritage of these areas and the genuine love that these people have for their land (the place they live and raise their children) can be threatened by a mining industry that will be in-and-out in thirty years.

Communities will be affected by noise, dust, increased vehicle movement on local roads, disproportional incomes between mining and rural service families in small rural towns, increased rental/housing prices and decreased land values in areas immediately adjacent to the mine site (to name but a few impacts). Our family will be directly affected by many aspects if a mine is approved at Felton, but the one that makes us most sad, is one that is impossible to put a value on. Personally, we will be affected because the hills, over which the sun sets, won't be there anymore. How does someone put a value on that?

Conclusion

Mining in the Murray Darling Basin (whether on the ridges, the valley floors or the extensive floodplains) has the potential to significantly affect the health of a river system already in crisis. Mining will also undo the years of "caring for our country", a job that farmers have done well and could continue to do for many more generations. It will fracture our communities and seriously impact on our ability to provide food for our nation. The decision to approve mine developments must be taken very seriously, as many of the impacts cannot be undone or fixed up once they have occurred, even with a rigorous EIS process.

I want my three sons to grow up proud of the fact that they live in a farming community and proud of the fact that we believed in the cause so much that we fought to keep it that way.

Mrs Vicki Green.