

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

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

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Background

Brigalow Jimbour Floodplains Group (BJFG) operates in an area of the Condamine Catchment from Dalby to Chinchilla to north of Jandowae and Bell on Queensland's Western Darling Downs. BJFG has been assisting landholders to better manage their environmental resources since 1992. The Group represents over 400 landholders with holdings within this area and is managed by a local committee consisting of landholders from the region's sub catchments.

Falling within the BJFG Landcare area are several existing or proposed mining projects. Including the Wilkie Creek Coal Mine, The Kogan Creek power station operated by CS energy, The Haystack Road MDL currently owned by Tarong Energy, and Exploration currently underway on the Jimbour Plain by Newhope Coal. As a result mining has been an issue of much debate for the group in the past several years.

The main area of mining interest in the BJFG areas falls on what is known as the Brigalow-Jimbour Floodplain. This area extends from the Bunya Mountain foothills in the north to the Condamine River in the south. This flood plain has the unique attribute of having a mere 0.02 degree fall over its entire area and in some sections even less. This extremely flat gradient means that water flow over the floodplain can be affected by disturbances as small as fence lines and rills from grading gravel roads.

Submission

Any obstacle to natural water flow on the Brigalow-Jimbour Floodplain has been demonstrated to have significant knock-on issues further down the catchment, even affecting the flow of water into the Condamine River. Brigalow Jimbour Floodplains Group is justifiably worried that mining operations on the floodplain would have an adverse affect on this delicate system of water flow.

It is plainly seen that the existing rail line which runs from Dalby to Chinchilla across the south of the region creates a drastic change in water flows reaching the lower floodplain. This demonstrates banks which would be needed to protect large mining developments from flood waters would have a dramatic affect on water flow. The raising of any banks even to 20 or 30 cm of height can cause significant flooding in nearby areas where the water is redirected and

loss of vital soil moisture in areas below the bank receiving a loss of overland flow. This creates significant problems with productivity in areas surrounding water flow alterations and due to the minimal slope over the whole area affects are often surprising in their scale.

It would be a concern for the group, not just the farming land lost to any mining operation on the floodplain, but to the neighbours who would have altered water flow due to mining operations and would experience strong adverse affects.

It would be impossible to compensate in any form the loss of this water flow and soil moisture around a significant disturbance such as a coal or other mine on the floodplain. These losses have been shown by other small alterations to be long term and to increase in severity over time.

BJFG appreciates the value of mining to the national, state and especially local economy. However; the group believes there need to be stricter guidelines surrounding the selection of appropriate sites. From our experience Mining located on slight slopes or foot hills is far better for the environment and water flow than that on a floodplain and would, in the group's opinion, incur far less opposition from landholders.

It is worth noting that the loss of any one property to mining is devastating to the landholder but we acknowledge this must occur for progress to be made. When sites are inappropriately located however (such as on a floodplain) not only the landholders immediately under the area are affected but those many kilometres distant will be affected by flooding in some areas and significant loss of soil moisture in others. The flat treeless nature of the floodplain will also exacerbate the other undesirables of many mining operations such as noise, dust and annoyance of night lighting.

Another aspect which concerns the Landcare group is the significant investment in environmental works which has been made by landholders and governments on the floodplains over the last 17 years. Landholders with financial and technical support from the group have spent in hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars annually to manage the delicate water flow issues on the floodplain. Most of this investment will come to nothing if such a large interruption to the floodplains natural water flow as a coal mine is carried out.

Summary

Mining must have a place in modern Australia but that cannot be at the cost of delicate and important environmental and agricultural systems which many individuals and governments have invested heavily in to maintain.

Surely there are other potential options to the mining companies than to mine fragile and highly productive land? As the mining industry has the ability and backing of legislation to earmark potentially productive deposits for mining surely agriculture should have the same opportunity to identify highly productive areas for use in agriculture?

Whilst the current tensions remain there will always be difficulties and aggression over the balance between mining and farming. We all deserve to live in a community where the

guidelines are clear and fair with the aim to sustainability and long term outcomes for community, industry and the environment. Whilst mining is part of this so must be agriculture.

James Hall
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