

SENATE DUST ENQUIRY

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I have been told an enquiry is being undertaken into dust and gas.

My family have lived in Collinsville for over 90 years. In that whole time the town has had operating coal mines. The mines are currently expanding. We have been concerned about the dust and gas for many years but it has fallen on deaf ears.

Originally our mines were underground mines. The people most affected by gas and the dust were the miners themselves. However with the construction of our coal fired powerhouse and the introduction of open cut mining, people in the community were and still are exposed to dust and gases.

Collinsville is placed beside the Collinsville Mine. In the early days miners used to walk to work. The proximity of the mine to the town is a concern. Miners going to and from work have seen smoke and gases silently settling over the town. It was noticeable in the night time and early morning especially in winter when you have the inversion layers. Last year Collinsville Coal was closed down temporarily because of extensive gas on the field caused by spontaneous combustion fires which were out of control. Twenty –two workers were affected in one instance. One woman was taken to Rockhampton and put in an induced coma. Other workers spoke of having headaches on the lease and monitors which were not calibrated correctly. Workers were regularly being taken to Collinsville Hospital after exposure to the gases. Another mine worker, a year before had told me approximately 5 workers a month were being treated at the Collinsville Hospital over the previous 5 years. I tried to obtain some statistics through Queensland Health and our local member Rosemary Menkins to no avail. Since the shutdown Collinsville Coal has been working to contain the fires. We have little information and no idea how successful their efforts have been. Collinsville Coal did their own air quality testing last year but again there is no information publically available for the community to scrutinise.

A miner who is also a family man mentioned to me his concern regarding the rain water tanks at the Collinsville Primary School. He was concerned about dust going into the rainwater tanks and the children drinking polluted water. In November last year my elderly mother's rain water tank was emptied to clean it out. It has over 15 centimetres of sticky, black sludge in the bottom. We expected brown dirt not black sludge. The outlet from the tank is only a couple of centimetres from the bottom of the tank. So the rain water we were drinking was coming through this black sludge. There has never been any overall testing of rainwater tanks in the town.

Scottville is due south of the powerhouse and Collinsville Coal. Over the years when the northerly monsoons came we always had a layer of fine black dust coming into our homes. Currently the powerhouse is not operating and the mining operations behind Scottville are quiet.

Qcoal have Sonoma Mine operating five kilometres south of Collinsville. If you stand on Reservoir Hill and look towards Sonoma Mine you can clearly see a distinct valley between the mine and Collinsville. The main prevailing winds from the south east channel any gases from blasting, dust from mining operations or fumes from the diesel machinery directly into Collinsville along this natural valley.

In the last two years we have been reading many new applications for extensions to QCoal's operations. Cow's Coal, Jax Mine, Drake Mine and Byerwen Mine. The mining companies are allowed to self-monitor and self-regulate. They do mean averages which cover up peaks and troughs. We have no confidence in the accuracy of their monitors, wherever they are. By the time information is publically available it is out of date and irrelevant. We have found the government does not require the monitoring of PM 2.5 particles. Even though the particles travel further and can be absorbed into the blood stream and are carcinogenic. The mining companies and the government are deliberately ignoring the risks to human health.

There is a family on Pelican Creek who suffer dreadfully from the dust from Sonoma Coal which is only about 2 kilometres from their home. They also have the railway line running close by their house. So they are exposed to the noise pollution and dust pollution from the coal trains.

The aerodrome is directly across Coral Creek from Sonoma Mine. The caretaker and his wife have to vacate their house when Sonoma Mine are blasting. Sonoma Coal has also interfered with flights at the airport when blasting.

When the missing railway link between Nebo and Glenden was built the whole line to Abbott Point was upgraded. Collinsville had been excluded from providing any input into the plans. The townspeople requested a deviation away from the town because of the expected massive increase in rail traffic. The current railway track runs very close to homes along Station Street. They are being kept awake by the noise and vibration and their homes and yards are constantly coated in coal dust. They protested and had meetings with the government and railway authorities who stalled and fobbed them off. Their compromise was to construct a boom gate which was simply window dressing which resolved nothing. When the new mines come into production it is expected there will be trains every 7 minutes. If an ambulance is needed for residents on the other side of the blocked railway crossing, lives could be lost.

The mining companies are proposing to spray a film on the coal wagons to reduce the dust. Will the coating stop the coal dust blowing off all the way to Abbott Point? Can they be relied on to apply it to all their coal trains? It still does not address the noise pollution.

We also had a situation on Red Hill years ago where there were dangerous salts and heavy metal coming to the surface near the local football field. It extended across the road into resident's yards, the golf course and the Mine creek next to the Bowling Club. Years ago we had a spate of bowlers dying of cancer. Native trees died and people were afraid to eat food from their vegetable gardens.

For many years we had a permanent and stable population. It was noticeable that many people suffered and died of cancer. A local doctor who was here for over 10 years also mentioned to me the high rate of cancer in the area. It has never been investigated. Today the FI/FO and DI/DO have diluted the population and would make it difficult to monitor.

We are now fighting a new threat to our health. Mining companies are now interfering with our waterways and are being allowed to pollute our creeks and

rivers with their pit water. They are relying on the waterways diluting the problem. No consideration is given to the cumulative effects from all the mines releasing into the waterways. Any penalties for unlawful releases are a pittance, a joke. They play down any potential harm. There is no independent monitoring.

In Australia we seem to have no rights to clean air, clean soil and clean water. There is nothing in place to protect our air, water and soil. Mining companies are being allowed to pollute with impunity.

Yours sincerely,

Carol Cosentino

Wednesday, 13th march 2013.