

To the Committee Secretary of the Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport,

I have written many e-mails to a few politicians on this issue and only ever received acknowledgment replies. I'm amazed that there is so much buck passing between politicians when it comes to coal mining issues affecting their areas of responsibility. It appears that their own political agendas and live cattle exports are more important than human beings as far as government priorities go.

However, I wish to express my great concern over the issue of coal mining on the Darling Downs. Specifically, the close proximity of the mining leases to small rural townships like ours. I'm talking about the Oakey township which is located some 30 km west of Toowoomba, Qld.

Located approximately 14 kilometres north-northwest of Oakey, is the New Acland coal mine. At the moment, the mine is behind the hills and it is a case of out-of-sight, out-of-mind.

Earlier this year, I became aware of plans by the New Acland Coal (NAC) consortium to expand their operation from their current site, towards our town as a part of their proposed Stage 3 expansion. **It was kept fairly quiet.** Not many people in Oakey know what is planned.

The Environmental Impact Study (EIS) submitted by NAC to support their project, show the mining lease in detail on their maps, which indicate that it will extend out from its current location to approximately 5 km from the Oakey town boundary. **This is too close to our town.**

The EIS stated that the natural watercourse (Lagoon creek) will be diverted to allow mining operations to be carried out. This effectively will add to the risk of flooding in our region if we experience weather patterns such as those at the start of 2011. The mine will act as a large dam and they will pump the water out into our watercourses flooding us and polluting our environment with the toxic chemicals leached out of the coal. **We are at the start of the Murray Darling catchment.**

It also forecast a marked increase in both heavy vehicular and rail traffic through the local Oakey area. We already have **uncovered** coal trains running through our town 24/7. Many **uncovered** heavy dump trucks are hauling coal towards Brisbane every day now. **How many more can there be?**

Coal is toxic. It contains many bio-toxic and radioactive elements that are dangerous to humans. Its effects are cumulative and permanent. This is a known medical fact. **Why are governments ignoring this?**

The concerns we have out here are; **damage to our health** (think about our children and the wider community), **degraded air quality** (fine particles PM 2.5/PM 1 in the air, that get into people's lungs, which can cause respiratory problems and illnesses), **water pollution** (local catchments/ rainwater tanks, ingestion of heavy metals and other toxic compounds), **noise pollution** (even as far away as Goombungee and properties near the current site experience machinery noise 24/7), **blasting vibration/noise/dust**, (recent event where blasting tremors were felt at Oakey township, even though the mine is 14km away) **extremely bright lighting**

all night (effectively turning night into day), **residents leaving our town** (not wanting to live near a mining operation so close to their homes) and **a subsequent loss in property values** (again because no-one will want to live here).

Below is a link to an article in the Toowoomba Chronicle regarding a recent event where blasting from the existing mine site was heard and felt in Oakey. What's going to happen if the Stage 3 expansion of the mine is approved and the mining activity is much closer?

<http://www.thechronicle.com.au/story/2011/06/09/coal-mine-blasts-blamed-for-oakey-shakes/>

These particular effects of open cut coal mining cannot be risk mitigated, no matter what the mining company says. There is always the 24/7 machinery noise, dust, pollution and the displacement of local residents as a result of their activities. The majority of mine workers don't want to live near a mine and expose their families to a health risk. They live as far away as manageable from the mine they work at. Open cut mining is a dirty business. **Why are 450 mining jobs more important than 4000 Oakey residents?**

This effectively translates into a loss in revenue for local businesses, affecting their viability and limiting local employment opportunities for the local residents. Local businesses are a valuable contributor to the economy and provide employment as well. Not everyone can work in the resources sector.

I am at a loss to understand as to why such a project could even be considered for approval.

As well as the Acland mine expansion, a mining company called Blackwood Coal want to commence operations on their Exploration Permit for Coal (EPC 1979) to the east of Oakey. That is the main direction that our prevailing winds come from, most months of the year. We will be bombarded by constant machinery noise, blasting vibration and dust if it were to be approved as well. **What on earth is going on?**

Entire towns and farming regions are covered by these Exploration Permits, effectively overriding all residents and landowner's rights. Whatever happened to the term Freehold? We pay for the land. We pay council rates. How can this be allowed to happen to us?

We do not need to be destroyed like the Hunter Valley Region of NSW. The health / social impact of these industries on entire communities both there and overseas are severe and well documented. Can't we learn from others mistakes? Why repeat them?

It needs to stop.

Open cut coal mines cannot co-exist next to towns or prime agricultural areas without affecting local resident's health in some way. Even if residents live and work within 5 - 6 km of an open cut mining operation, they will be exposed to the health impacts and cumulative effects associated with it. Even the health of the mine workers is affected by the coal dust. There are no 'mutual' benefits as often promised by mining companies.

What do we do once our town is surrounded by mining operations?

How will we cope with the many health problems as a result of being near the mine?

Who will find us a place to live, give us an income or another business to run if we are forced to move because of this?

The absentee owners of the mining companies do not care about us. They do not live here, they don't even shop here and they want nothing more than to exploit the coal resource as quickly as they can, making as much money as possible, destroying our land to the detriment of a local community economy.

We are very angry out here.

I know that the residents in Jondaryan district are already dealing with the effects of a large coal loading facility on its boundary. They weren't consulted; there was no compensation and no care given to the residents. This was forced onto them. There, fine coal dust is in the air, residents are breathing it in; it's covering homes and polluting the rainwater catchments. They are getting sick. **We do not want Oakey to be exposed to the same risks.** This town is our home and livelihood.

These web links tell how coal mining affected Acland residents, effectively they had no choice but to accept payment for their home and move -

<http://qcl.farmonline.com.au/news/state/agribusiness-and-general/general/mining-strips-quality-of-life/2212455.aspx>

<http://www.thechronicle.com.au/story/2011/06/20/woman-hopes-story-will-inspire-residents/>

Out here, we are real people, with real families, with real businesses, creating real employment opportunities and living in real communities. Let's think about the future for our children and grandchildren who have to live with the long term consequences if mining operations are approved so close to where they live.

Oakey and district residents are calling on you to help stop the Stage 3 Expansion of the Acland Coal mine and to prevent any other mining operations being granted within close proximity to towns such as ours.

We need protection. The proposed Stage 3 Expansion of the Acland Coal mine needs to be stopped. All Exploration Permits that cover our town and those located on our doorstep need to be revoked or at the very least, not renewed. A **realistic separation distance (15-20 km)** needs to be established between mining activities and towns/residential areas. **This should be a mandatory requirement.**

Why do our kids have to suffer because of the mining cash grab?

We are being ignored out here. Why?

What did we do to deserve this?

Why aren't any Govts listening to us?

I have provided an extract of an IRTM map showing our local area and the proposed location and proximity of the Stage 3 expansion to our town.

I have also provided a map from the EIS submitted by New Hope Coal that shows Oakey with respect to the mines forecast location.

It is common knowledge, that the mining companies will not stick to the timelines as indicated in their EIS. Just ask any ex-Acland resident. The mining companies will only ever tell you what you want to hear.

This is a link to an article from the Toowoomba Chronicle about the town meeting I held at Oakey. More residents are asking questions regarding the Stage 3 expansion of the Acland coal mine. Many are becoming concerned.

<http://www.thechronicle.com.au/story/2011/06/20/meeting-voices-opposition-to-mines-expansion-plans/>

My life has now changed forever because, until I can get this mining application squashed and the exploration permits surrounding our towns revoked, I won't be able to relax, enjoy peace and security for my family or community.

I have chosen to speak out, rather than to ignore the issue or to suffer in silence like the Acland and Jondaryan residents. I will be urging the entire Oakey community to speak out about this issue.

I will be holding another Community Meeting at the Oakey Cultural Centre on Monday the 25 July @6.30pm. Please attend if you are able. I aim to spread the message that we are facing an imminent threat to our community and we need to fight it.

This needs to end. Please do something to help stop this. Now.

Please contact me anytime if you would like further information on this issue or would like to visit us out here.

Sincerely,

Peter Faulkner

06 Jul 11
