

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

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

From:
Alan Ellis

Background

I am a farmer from the Haystack Road area on the Darling Downs in southern Queensland. I moved to this area from a farming district in southern New South Wales over 50 years ago.

I have seen many changes in agriculture during my lifetime and believe that the floodplain on which I live is managed and farmed in a more sustainable way than it has ever been and I have confidence that crops can be produced in a sustainable manner for a very long time to come.

Submission

The proposed mining of various areas of the Murray Darling Basin is bound to adversely affect the basin as a whole depending on the location of mining, the type of soil, the normal overland flow and especially during flood time and the effect mining may have on existing underground streams.

With the extraction of gas from coal seams there appears to be an unending supply of very salty water to be stored in ponds and the salt to be disposed of somehow. This alone could pose a major problem during flood time.

Open cut mining in areas such as Haystack Road, the Jimbour Plain, Felton Valley and Brookstead will not only create problems for the Murray Darling Basin but could very easily ruin forever this highly productive agricultural land. There have been claims that this land can be reclaimed to its original state – I believe this could not be possible. Where is the evidence that this can happen? –should we sacrifice this prime farming land and just trust to luck that reclaiming it is possible?

I can't imagine how anyone could even contemplate wrecking highly productive food producing land when the world is facing serious food shortages.

Premier Bligh said at a meeting at Highfields that we have enough coal at the rate of last year's usage to last 300 years. I believe that we should go carefully and not upset the Murray Darling Basin more than we have to.

Another angle to consider is that towns in areas of highly productive agricultural land have always been dependent on income from agriculture. In 25 to 30 years time when the coal has been mined from this highly productive farming land, there will be nothing left – no farming – what then. A short term gain for a very bleak future!

Summary

Prime agricultural land in the Murray Darling Basin should be protected with legislation to ensure that production of food is maintained for as long as the population needs food.