

Mrs Penny Blatchford

25th June 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Inquiry into management of the Murray Darling Basin – impact of mining coal seam gas

I am a 4th generation farmer from the North West of NSW farming dryland broadacre east of Gurley and Bellata, South of Moree. My husband Robert (2011 Australian Nuffield Scholar) and I have three children. (below).



Photo 1 – The Blatchford Family of Gurley

Photo 2 – Durum Wheat- Nandewar Ranges and Gurley Creek in background

The Moree Plains Shire is recognised as NSW's largest agricultural shire with highly productive agricultural lands throughout the Shire. The particular area I am from is highly productive agricultural land with land values from approximately \$3700 ha plus.

On our particular landholding we farm 7,000 ha no-till dryland broadacre crops such as durum wheat, bread wheat, faba-beans, chickpeas, millet, barley, sorghum and cotton as well as cattle. Crops are grown on rotation season to season. The machinery that we own is on 3 metre wheel spacing's which allows all machinery to drive only in one particular place in the fields to minimise compaction. The machinery that we use is the most modern you can buy using global positioning satellite navigation systems. The widths of the machinery are at the current maximum on the market that being 36 metre wide (spray machinery and planting machinery). The soil type is black loamy self mulching on sloping to undulating country. The Gurley Creek runs through our properties.

2011 has seen the largest cotton crop in Australia's history we have contributed to the record producing our own record number of cotton bales.

The reason that I have briefly outlined my own particular farm is to emphasize the importance of planning and implementing exclusion zones from exploration and mining for highly productive agricultural lands.

The economic, social and environmental impacts on agriculture must be researched and carefully considered for these highly productive agricultural lands. Australia may now be in a unique position of feeding its nation. However, if mining is allowed to proceed in highly productive agricultural areas such as the Bellata Gurley area in the Moree Shire, Liverpool Plains of NSW and the Darling Downs in Qld our future food security will be at risk.

As a broadacre dryland farmer – continuing to farm on a day to day basis alongside mining would be impossible. As I mentioned before our machinery drives only in one particular place to reduce compaction, the fields need to be free of any fencing, ponds, dams, roads, to allow for the wide machinery to carry out their operations and to turn around – a machine 36 metres wide on a gps system can not zig zag and needs plenty of room to move. And there can be no risk of salinity and contamination of the water and soils – the impact on yields and the capacity to produce crops and earn a living would be reduced to nil with contaminated, saline soils and water. It is also the water we drink, wash in, spray our crops with, water gardens, and livestock drink.



Photo 3 – 36 metre dryland cotton planter on 3 metre spacings

Photo 4 – JD 7760 Cotton baler modified to cover 12 metre double skip on 3 metre spacings with additional trailer to carry bales out of the field. Reduces compaction and traffic infield.

Photo 5 – 36 metre JD 4930 spray rig 3 metre spacings

There is so much that I could write to the Senate enquiry as to how the coal seam gas mining will impact negatively on highly productive agricultural land. In no particular order the sustainability of all Australian farmers is at risk, the inability to farm on a day to day basis, the risk to water aquifers, risk to soil and water from salinity and contamination, land values, our safety, prosperity and future of our business and children, health impacts, mental health impacts, food security.

PLEASE STOP THE COAL SEAM GAS MINING AND ALLOW TIME FOR SENSIBLE RESEARCH AND DECISIONS TO BE MADE TO PROTECT OUR HIGHLY PRODUCTIVE AGRICULTURAL FARMLANDS.

I write to you as an Australian mother, wife, farmer, business woman, environmentalist, concerned individual for Australia's future food security asking you to please introduce into the New South Wales Parliament Mining Act, 1992:

1. That the current moratorium extend to all owners of rural properties in New South Wales who have highly productive, agricultural holdings and who oppose access to their land by companies seeking exploration, drilling and mining entitlements over such lands.
2. That there be an immediate cessation of all proposed activities by these companies including access to land, exploration drilling and mining until such time as a government review is carried out whereby highly productive, agricultural lands are classified as exclusion zones and thereby removed from exploration, drilling and mining.

Yours sincerely,

Penny Blatchford