

# Maules Creek Coal Project

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Project Application Number 10-0138

**A Submission by Mr. Alistair Todd of "East Lynne" Maules Creek , Boggabri 2382**

**10/9/2011**

A submission prepared by Mr. Alistair Todd of the merits or lack thereof of the Maules Creek Coal Project as presented within the Environmental Assessment by Aston Resources from the perspective of a resident and beef cattle producer from the Maules Creek Community and District.

## **Introduction:**

Nothing focuses the mind quite like intrusion of white utes bearing red flags, of yellow hard hats and reflective vests, the constant hum of the drilling rigs on their endless quest across the vast Australian countryside for black gold, the continual bombardment of ads in the local paper of new exploration leases and the editorials of the enormous bounties that these projects offer. It is the insidious expansion of the coal industry. It's dirty and noisy and exciting and a fabulous export earner, or so we are led to believe.

And this is where the conflict between agriculture and mining begins.

## **The Issues:**

Self-interest is never far from the surface, whichever side of a debate is being examined. From the big end corporate boardrooms to the bowels of governments, there is the never-ending appetite for fat profits and royalties, the economic prosperity that the minerals industry proclaims.

Then we have the coal communities. Those communities that reside within throwing distance of the mines, those communities that bear the social consequences of the mines. The dust, the noise, the traffic, the destroyed ecosystems and disrupted alluvial aquifers.

As a resident and farmer of Maules Creek it would be easy to decide upon which side of the debate I belong, but the answer is not as simple as that. As a shareholder of BHP one would assume that I support the minerals industry and the economic benefits provided by Australia's vast mineral resources, the explosion of jobs, the community infrastructure that sometimes follows the boom, the massive injection of capital into regional communities and the flow-on effects that this can provide.

Then there are the negatives. The net-externalities, the consequences of the boom that nobody wishes to talk about. It is a symptom of bad planning at both a corporate and government level that these inequalities do exist, and are guaranteed to occur within the community of Maules Creek and further afield within the Narrabri Shire as a direct consequence of the Maules Creek Coal Project as described within the Aston Resources environmental assessment.

As with all decisions that are considered using economic analysis, there are winners and losers. The winners tend to be those that are the owners of the project, and the associated workforce and industry that is necessary for the conduct of that project. There may be a residual economic benefit to the wider local economy such as increased residential land values and indirect jobs, but this is debateable as the net benefit may not outweigh the indirect costs the project introduces, such as increased rental prices, increased shire rates and increased cost of goods and services for those of us who are not in direct employment of the project or its associated service industries.

Then there are the coal communities, those families and businesses that are literally at the coal face. The Aston project in particular and the Leard Forest coal complex in general introduces a vast transfer of social, environmental and economic wealth from the local families and businesses of the Maules Creek community into the hands of shareholders, many of which are foreign owned. This transfer occurs because of the unavoidable consequences of mining, those impacts that cannot be prevented due to the destructive polluting nature of open cut coal mining.

This transfer of wealth occurs because of the loss environmental capital, or of environmental public rights. The conversion of a sleepy (but productive) rural community into an industrial wasteland has numerous effects . There are the obvious, such as increased airborne pollution and noise, the destruction of ecosystems and increase in traffic, and then there are the less so obvious. The reduction of alluvial water tables beneath our feet, the slow depopulation of our community as the next farm is purchased for environmental "offsets" causing the loss of a valuable community member. And then we have the insidious, the sudden realisation of a farmer nearing retirement that their property is no longer saleable due to the impacts of mining, the sudden unexplainable developments of health problems due to unknown toxic plumes, the mental health anguish of families at a loss to reconcile the change in their circumstances and finally we have the cumulative effects - that the critical thresholds that define and underpin our community no longer exist.

The DoP and the Planning Assessment Commission are tasked with an unenviable decision to make, a decision that must weigh the benefits of the Maules Creek Coal Project against its costs, the costs to the people of Maules Creek, this decision decides the future of our community of Maules Creek. As a farmer and resident of Maules Creek, I would urge those tasked with this decision to appreciate the merits and concerns of all submissions submitted for the Maules Creek Coal Project with the highest regard to the principles of equality. The ethical principle of equality, particularly intergenerational equality, is central to the concept of sustainable development. If the project is approved, then it must be approved with stringent conditions that ensure that there are no net external environmental, social or economic costs imposed upon the families, businesses and the community of Maules Creek.

### **Conclusion:**

In summary, I reject outright the merits of Maules Creek Coal Project proposal as submitted by Aston Resources on the grounds of a lack of a social licence to operate, and therefore recommend that project approval be declined.