

14 November 2016

Honourable Minister for Planning, Mr Robert Stokes

We are writing on behalf of the Boggabri Business & Community Progress Association to express our concerns about and bring you attention to the issues currently arising in relation to mining in our area.

Boggabri is located in rural North Western NSW and is in close proximity to Boggabri Coal (Idemitsu), Tarrawonga (Whitehaven/Idemitsu) and Maules Creek (Whitehaven). The Vickery mine (Whitehaven) has been approved but is not currently in operation with an extension in preparation for the approval process.

As a community in such close proximity, we have suffered significant impact to our environment as well as physical and social infrastructures during both the construction and operational phases of these mines. We recognize the benefits of mining to employment in our region and the resulting financial benefits to our community. We also recognize the significance of the mining economy to our State's economy, but we question the Government's licensing practices which, following the grant of consent, result in the acceptance of substantial royalties. Our communities and neighbouring landholders are then left to negotiate direct with the mining companies on what is obviously a very unequal equation.

We are not opposed to mining and realise that extractive industries are accompanied by noise, dust, blasting, water usage and both physical and social impacts. We are questioning however, what levels of these issues are acceptable and also the accuracy of the modelling that is used to gain a license to operate. As a community, we have been supportive of the mining developments, even during the protest periods, which are usually led by people not residing in our area that presume to speak on our behalf. Boggabri and surrounds are now experiencing social impacts that were not identified in the Environmental Impact Statements and we feel that these need to be acknowledged and addressed with the expectation that we achieve a mutually acceptable solution. Examples of such issues are as follows:

- Lack of government support for the Regional Dust Monitoring Network – a recommendation of the NSW Strategic Plan. We had an opportunity to establish a baseline but have been advised that we haven't reached "trigger levels" and we do not have the population per capita to warrant the same standards that the Hunter region is afforded.
- Landholders who find themselves within the affected zones are adversely affected by a flawed acquisition process and false representation of the potential earning capacity of the property involved. The ongoing vilification of a local landholder is both disturbing and unacceptable with Whitehaven's attitude and perceived negotiating skills lacking integrity and conscience.

- There is an inability and reluctance on the part of the mining companies to accept responsibility for the situations that they are creating. The Companies need to take ownership of the problems that they are creating and work proactively with the community to find a solution. For example, the noise and dust associated with the rail transport of coal through the centre of town and the resultant health impacts on the residents of Boggabri and district residents. The usage and health of the Namoi River, the life bloods of the Namoi Valley and beyond, are matters requiring URGENT attention.
- The promise of building new homes to attract families to our town has not been honoured. Liveable houses were removed in preparation for the construction of these homes and the town has been left with vacant land.
- Many productive family farms have been lost due to mine acquisition and the loss of contributions of these families to community, schools, churches, organisations has been great and the financial loss to our local businesses is unquantifiable. Our local Rural Fire Service has lost many trained and dedicated volunteers, but has gained many hectares of poorly managed, once productive land that is now standing unoccupied and posing a potential fire hazard of catastrophic proportions.
- There has been no liaison or consultation initiated by your Departments or the Mining Companies with adjoining landholders to discuss concerns or direct or indirect impacts caused by weed and feral animal population as outlined in the Draft Regional Biodiversity plan. The draft plan was developed without any input or consultation with adjoining landholders, farming groups or the Boggabri Community. You recommend and expect a consultation process, but there are no monitoring requirements to ensure that it has occurred. What are the penalties, if any, for lack of consultation?
- There are a growing number of members of our community that no longer believe that mines deserve or have earned the right to operate. The Government issues the Environmental Licence to operate attached to the Legislative requirements to be met, however, to gain the community's approval, it requires more than a financial contribution. It demands respect, honesty, trust and an understanding of the expectations and values of a community. The social licence is intangible – it cannot be legislated and withdrawn at any time. It is not an autocratic right of the mine and it should be earned and requires diligence to maintain

We believe that the time has come for your Department and all relevant government agencies to step up and take responsibility and initiate the decisions to exercise your duty of care to us as a community. The mines are licenced to operate, however, it is becoming increasingly apparent that some are only meeting minimum requirements. You as a Government are charged with ensuring the highest standards are adhered to and that the rights of our community are upheld.

We remind you that the State is currently reaping the benefits of our expansive coal reserves at the expense of our community, health, wellbeing and equality. By licensing the mining operations, you have accepted the responsibility to ensure that the impact of same are addressed. As a community, we are no longer willing to accept the process of "ticking boxes" with no consideration given by other parties to the long term effects and future of our town and surrounding areas.

You may not consider our community to be of great importance or significance, however, it would be remiss of you to underestimate the conviction, loyalty and determination of this country town. We will be heard and we will accept nothing less than honesty, integrity and complete transparency from mining companies and the State Government. We expect our community to be treated with the respect it deserves and anything less will no longer be tolerated.

Our Association is committed to improving and maintaining a safe, happy and prosperous community that has the infrastructure and support to continue into the future, post mining. The mines are part of our community and in the interest of moving forward, we need to forge a strong relationship based on trust, cooperation and good faith. For this to happen, the mining companies need to understand the fundamental values and dynamics of our town.

We strongly urge you to arrange a forum in Boggabri with your Department and any other relevant government bodies and presiding ministers to meet with our community before any further mining developments are considered or approved. The concerns and issues we have need to be addressed sooner rather than later.

We look forward to your favourable response.

Yours faithfully