

Submission opposing the Vickery Extension Project

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After completing my University of Queensland degree of Applied Science majoring in Agronomy in November 2017 I have decided to return home to my families property (144 on the Land Ownership map, *Figure 1-5a*) to continue my career in the agricultural industry. I therefore object the proposal put forth by Whitehaven Coal for the Vickery Extension Project (VEP). After reading the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), meetings with Whitehaven Coal, attending various community information meetings and reading the reports of non-compliance from Whitehaven I believe that agriculture and the liveability for my family and others in the community will be severely impacted.

A major concern I have with the VEP is the proposed rail spur. The rail spur is of concern to me, as I believe the construction of the railway line on the Emerald Hill-Boggabri floodplain is likely to have drastic impacts on the flow of water during flood events. Although Whitehaven Coal have assured that the rail line will be built above flood level, it is said in the EIS that the railway line will be partly built up. There are no other details on the design of the railway line of how high the rail line is to be built off the ground, how deep pylons will be, the distance between pylons or whether boxed culverts will be used. Without these details in the EIS I am very concerned that the railway line will not be built at adequate heights at which no ramifications will affect surrounding landholders. If box culverts were to be used anywhere along the rail spur it is going to cause washouts of the topsoil greatly affecting the productivity of the field and having adjacent fields to the the rail spur like my family this is also of great concern. As I understand the flooding model is based off flows from the Namoi river and have not taken into account combined peak flows from both the Namoi river, Rangari Creek and Collygra creek simultaneously. This is very likely to have greater flood levels than what is estimated in the modelling done by Whitehaven Coal in the EIS and for its impact to be absent from the EIS it is very alarming.

Other effects the railway line is going to have is the damage on agricultural farming. As the railway line is going to be situated within 20m on the other side of the boundary fence I am expected to experience crop damage throughout the entire life of the coalmine. Coal dust is likely to blow off from the carriages onto our fields adjacent to the railway line. Crop penalties and yield limitations are expected from both cotton, grains and forage grown. Over the lifetime of the mine it could cost our family hundreds of thousands of dollars due to lost productivity and quality. Furthermore if pylons are going to be used for the railway line it is unknown the effect this could have on the ground water. For pylons to be used they would need to be driven into the ground quite deep and it is unknown whether the pylons will go into the underground aquifer due to a lack of design details in the EIS. As my family and many other neighbouring farms rely on underground water for productive crops and domestic use, we believe it is not worth risking our most valuable resource when they drill large pylons into the ground if it could potentially affect the ground water source.

The liveability of the blocks on the two houses and a future house in which we are hoping to develop on our property as well as dwellings many of neighbours have are also likely to be impacted by the railway line. In the EIS there is no noise corridors for the railway spur. Whitehaven Coal are implying that no effects will

be felt on these dwellings as they have also said in various meetings. This is quite hard to believe that the noise generated by the trains have no effect on dwellings even when they are in close proximity to the rail spur. The noise of construction will be constant and then on completion with trains going 24 hours a day it is likely to disturb sleeping patterns of nearby residents. The serenity is also going to be severely damaged as a peaceful farming community that Dorathea McKellar wrote about in Sunburnt Country is going to destroy picturesque views.

Other factors that concern me for the liveability of the property from the mine and the railway line is the effect of dust on the dwellings. As the mine is open cut blasting's are going to be a regular occurrence. I see this as problematic as it is quite likely to be a hazard to the residents living here. With weather conditions often being unpredictable I fear that coal dust is likely to contaminate houses possibly leading to a variety of health problems and destroy the drinking water captured in rainwater tanks. This would destroy any chances of myself and other young people in the community from raising a family on farm, which would be the end of the local community. I also believe factors such as this could have toxic effects on nearby waterways such as the river which many of us for recreational activities such as fishing, camping, barbeques and kayaking.

The coal handling and processing plant (CHPP) is also a major part of the extension that should not go ahead. Having the CHPP so close to the river is a disaster waiting to happen. It has the potential to contaminate river water that will not only affect local residents but a number of communities down stream. The noise and light pollution is also going to severely impact on local residents, that have been personally told by the spokespeople of the mine that they won't be affected based on modelling done by people employed by the mine.

Past performances of Whitehaven are a cause for concern now they intend to develop another mine, this time close to the Namoi river and a rail spur on the Emerald Hill-Boggabri floodplain. It is well documented in local media that Whitehaven are often noncompliant with their mining licences over a range of incidences. The Northern Daily Leader has reported that between 2010 and 2016 Whitehaven Coal had 50 breaches to their licencing conditions. Penalties seem to be a "slap on the wrist" for a company worth millions/billions. This is evident where Whitehaven were fined \$1500 for mining an extra 136,000 tonnes of coal over their limit at Tarrawonga and more recently exceeding water licence limits. This illustrates to me that Whitehaven Coal are rule breakers and are more than happy to bypass the legalities of running a coal mine and pay a small fine and in return make millions of dollars. This is further illustrated that the EIS is written for the Vickery Coal Pty Ltd which is an attempt for Whitehaven Coal to appear more compliant than what they actually are as this new company has only been created in the last four months and has zero breaches to its name. This demonstrates to me that Whitehaven will do anything to get this Vickery Extension approved so that they can essentially operate their mine with no consideration of the surrounding neighbours and the effects it will have on local communities.

Whitehaven Coal has withdrawn their plans to mine the Blue Vale pit, however I would not be surprised if the EIS is approved by the department of planning, they will integrate the Blue Vale pit as part of their operation. This pit is too close to the Namoi river to be deemed safe and would have detrimental impacts on the environment. It is also rumoured that after they plan on finishing the Vickery mine they will look to keep expanding and continue mining into the Vickery state forest. I believe having this large mining company over a period greater than 25 years will eventually wear away at local farmers and there will be little to no farmers left in one of the most productive agricultural areas in the country.

So to summarize why the mine Vickery Mine extension should not go ahead is that the railway line is likely to dramatically impact the flow of water during flood events, agricultural production is going to be limited due to dust contaminating crops, ground water could be severely impacted by construction of railway pylons. The liveability of local communities is going to be adversely affected as dust, noise and pollution does not make dwellings on nearby properties a safe place to raise a family and the serenity is destroyed which is a major reason as to why so many dwellings have been built in the area. And finally Whitehaven can not be trusted to be compliant with their mining licences. As Whitehaven seem to be a law unto themselves they seem to ignore the rules in pursuit of making large amounts of money as they know fines are so minuscule. The consequences of this mine extension to go ahead are too great in order for Whitehaven to make a quick buck. It will drive agriculture out of family owned farms for good.