

# Watt Family Submission

Our family live and work on the farm Erinvale situated approximately 4.5 km south west of the project (identified as property 140 in the EIS). We are active members of the Boggabri community and have three children attending primary school in Boggabri. We both have Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degrees from the University of Sydney. We purchased our farm at Boggabri because of its fertile black soils and high quality and reliable groundwater. The farm is highly productive due to its soil, winter and summer rainfall and good temperatures enabling both summer and winter crops to be grown successfully. We also have an Upper Namoi Alluvium Zone 4 groundwater licence providing access to very good quality, relatively shallow and stable aquifers, which allow us to irrigate crops gaining high yields and extra income to our business. We also rely on this water for stock and domestic use. The river also means a great deal to our family as it is where we go swimming, kayaking, fishing and camping.

This submission outlines the many objections and concerns we have with this project. It must be noted that we have had very limited time to fully investigate and understand the project with only 42 days of exhibition period. Giving that our application for a time extension was denied, we may have additional concerns that arise post submission deadline which should also be equally considered.

In addition to the personal concerns directly affecting our family and our property identified below, please refer to the in-depth submission provided by the Boggabri Farming and Community Group.

## **1. Baseline Groundwater Data and Continued Monitoring of Groundwater**

Our 3 irrigation bores and 2 stock and domestic bores have not been considered in the bore census to assess baseline groundwater. We are very concerned the mine will affect our bore water depths and quality. The EIS states that the drawdown of groundwater bores will be less than 2m (the minimum harm criterion) and if it is greater than 2m they will put in place "make good" provisions. Our first concern with this is that the allowable drawdown of 2 metres is too large, a much less drawdown would affect the capability of our bores to produce their current capacities which we require to run our operation. We request that groundwater minimum criterion drawdown be investigated further and that it be lowered as not to affect landholders adversely. Our second concern is that if our bores are not on the bore census will the proponent recognise our own water quality tests and water depth measurements when determining their impact? We request that an independent expert conduct bore analysis to provide background data prior to any consent approval so there can be no discrepancies later. Also, this independent testing should be conducted on a regular basis throughout the project life and/or when the landholder identifies changes in bores.

## **2. Land devaluation and financial security.**

As we have never experienced living near a coal mine, we are living in uncertainty as to the extent that we will be affected by the Vickery Extension Project. One thing we know for sure is that our land will be devalued as a result of our proximity to the project. Most people don't want to live and farm near a coal mine. It only takes one less buyer in an auction room to drastically reduce the market price of a property. The effects of this for us, as farmers, is compounded as our properties are our only assets, our superannuation plan, and our legacy and inheritance for our children. Property devaluation affects our ability to borrow in times of

drought and to expand our business. Just as the effects of dust and noise for coal mines are considered and mitigated under VLAMP, so too should land devaluation. We request that prior to any development consent, a negotiated agreement is reached between our family and the proponent to mitigate against, or if need be compensate for depreciation of land values.

### **3. Social Impacts**

Appendix R section 1.5.2 states that 17 neighbouring landholders were interviewed for the social impact study, yet we were not included. This study is not representative if a landholder that is only 4 km from the mine is not considered in their social impact study of neighbouring landholders. Due to our concerns not being documented in this EIS we will state some of them here.

- The proponent has shown little care for the farmers and the rural community surrounding their Maules Creek Coal Mine (MCCM). The lack of consideration of the negative impacts on their neighbours has already been more than evident with the constant breaches of the MCCM's Environment Protection Licence. Many farms have been bought out by the mine and those that haven't don't want to live there due the impacts. The proponent's MCCM has not provided us with a good example of what the Vickery Extension could be.
- We are losing too many farming families from the Boggabri community, the long term support base of the town. There seems to be a real conflict, communities or coal.
- The proponent has been unwilling to work collaboratively with the Boggabri community and farmers and if anything has treated us disrespectfully and provided little transparency of their intentions.
- Boggabri has not seen the promised benefits from mining in the district, yet has had to bear the brunt of the adverse effects of having mining on three sides of town. The Vickery Extension has moved the Boggabri township into the dominant prevailing winds from the mine. This increases the exposure of the residents, schools and businesses to particulate matter and blasting fumes.
- Boggabri is the centre of mining in the Gunnedah basin. Yet is not equipped with an industry standard and EPA recognised air monitor, when towns with no immediate coal mines like Tamworth, Gunnedah and Narrabri are. We request that prior to any development approval, the proponent funds an air monitor for Boggabri.
- The proponent claims the mine will employ 70% local people. This equates to 66 Boggabri locals, who aren't currently employed being employed at Vickery Extension Project. This is highly unlikely in a town with approximately 800 residents with already 4 mines employing those that want to work in the mines. They have exhausted the local workforce. It should be noted that the proponents definition of local includes drive in workers who rent a room in town for their shifts, then spend their time off and money back with their families elsewhere. They are not invested in our community.
- The proponent credits this mine as providing the numbers to secure a childcare centre in Boggabri, however a much smaller mining company in the community has already committed to funding a childcare centre as part of their VPA.
- Our family will bear the social costs from living near this mine and associated infrastructure.

- If this project proceeds we will lose neighbours that will not be able to live on their land. The sense of community is lost, we can't imagine the proponent will help us get through the droughts, floods, fires and many busy times of farming like our neighbours currently do.
- Our farm productivity and livelihoods could be drastically reduced due to groundwater interference and worse flooding events causing financial strain on our family
- We have concerns for our physical health with particulate matter, noise and blasting, especially with a child with asthma
- Our mental health has already been affected with the extra workload, stress and anxiety that comes with dealing with a proposed coal mine in addition to the arrogant and disrespectful way that Whitehaven Coal have treated us.

## **Conclusion**

If approved, our family are going to bear the burden of this coal mine development being unfairly imposed on us. We are not prepared to endure the many costs and risks of this project on our family's health and financial wellbeing. Prior to any development consent, we request that a negotiated agreement is reached with our family and the proponent.

We are going to be another rural area that has lost valuable agricultural land, farmers and rural communities due to extractive industries. Coal mines have already purchased over 70 farms in our district and if the Government approves Vickery Extension more farming families will be lost. Regional Australia needs strong rural communities, these communities largely exist because of farming and it is farming families that keep them going now and into the future.

We object to the Vickery Extension Project.