

## IPC Public Hearing – 26th February 2019 Moss Vale

Thank you for the opportunity to address this hearing.

My name is Daria Ball and while I now live in Moss Vale, I have framed what I am about to say through the experience of someone who farmed in Sutton Forest for 30 years from mid 1980s to 2017.

My late husband and I owned various farms in the area, totalling 889 hectares or 2,195 acres. Across that land we were licensed to draw 424 mega-litres of water in total from our various bores. Our farming business was Angus cattle, both a large stud herd that won many awards and a commercial recipient herd. At any one time we could be carrying as many as 900 to 1,000 head.

In normal years our bores were mostly idle with an average of 992 millimetres of rain or 36 inches. However from 2000 through to 2006 during the last long term drought in this area, rainfall was well below average. Consulting the records we kept I can reveal that in 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2006 we received half the annual rainfall average and in 2003 and 2005 it was a little better, but not great.

When rainfall was scarce during droughts our bores were used to top up dams that fed cattle drinking troughs. Cattle drink substantial amounts of water each day so dams and bores are essential, especially when carrying stud stock as they are the ones that a farmer never wants to divest no matter how bad the drought conditions.

During that severe drought, there was substantial discussion between various farm owners in Sutton Forest and Canyonleigh about the fact our bores were less productive, obviously due to the fact we were all drawing more water than in normal rainfall years. Some farmers were forced to have a drilling contractor in to search for better bore productivity at a lower depth in the aquifer as a result. Clearly the replenishment rate in the aquifer was operating well below normal rates.

2007 and 2008 were good rainfall years but in 2009 we were back to half our long term average rainfall and it has been up and down in the years since.

About twenty years ago I was advised by a water scientist consulting to us that while there is a huge amount of water in the aquifer under Sutton Forest, it takes a very long time for the water to seep through the geology and replenish the store. Hume Coal's own Environmental Impact Statement states that it could take between 36 to 65 years to return to normal due to their mine's operation and the water it will leach from the aquifer.

I simply cannot imagine how many water tankers it would take each and every day for Hume Coal to supply water to all the farms affected by its mine over that long period of the mine's activity and its subsequent hiatus while waiting for the aquifer to recover.

As we now know, drought years are becoming more regular in this area placing more strains on agriculture. If the issues that Hume Coal admit to are true this could be devastating for farmers in our area. However I believe that based on all the expert opinions commissioned via our community groups that the impact on the water in the aquifer will be far larger and have a greater adverse impact than Hume Coal predict. That would be catastrophic for some of the most productive farmland in the state of NSW.

We don't have to look too far for precedents:

- The Medway Colliery, now closed down, de-watered bores in its vicinity and then leached outflows from the mine that polluted the Wingecarribee River which in the end feeds into Sydney's drinking water.
- An independent panel has just published an initial report that finds it totally plausible that the Dendrobium Mine, between the Avon and Cordeaux dams, is diverting 3 million litres of water from Sydney's catchment each day.
- The same independent panel believes the Metropolitan Mine is diverting half a million litres a day from the Woronora Reservoir that supplies Wollongong.
- Other examples of negative water impacts caused by mines are also quite close to us at Thirlmere Lakes and the Cataract River.

Farmers are held to high standards, as they should be, by Water NSW, Sydney Catchment Authority, the local Council and the EPA. I can underline this by the fact that Wells Creek, which traversed a lot of our land in Sutton Forest, was in a bad state when we purchased the properties. Immediately we were required to undertake substantial reparations including building spillways to control flow, adding rock swales to help prevent erosion, planting thousands more trees and creating riparian zones along the sides of the creek. There was substantial cost attached to these works and in the end the bill was close to a million dollars.

Farmers are by nature protectors of the ecology so doing this work and funding it was seen by us as part of being good custodians of the land. However we were always amazed that these same high standards were never applied to miners. Just consider how many times vandalism of water resources and land through mining has been left for the NSW taxpayer to underwrite long after the miners moved on.

In closing I would like to comment on the fact that Hume Coal's own EIS reveals very little financial upside for the state of NSW through royalties over the life of their mine. Farming on the other hand has been a major contributor to the economy in this area since it first commenced in the mid-1800s and continues to be today through livestock farming, vineyards, olive groves and farm tourism.

The Moss Vale Livestock Exchange turns over 60,000 head of cattle per year, generating sales of \$30 to \$35 million. It is in the top ten saleyards in our state. If we deplete the water resources available to our farms there will be substantial flow on effects for years to come – financial, ecological and sociological.

I therefore respectfully request that the Independent Planning Commission fully endorses the recommendation of the Department of Planning and Environment, which views the Hume Coal Project as contrary to the public interest.

Thank you.