**Submission to the Independent Planning Commission.**

My husband and I have been farming at Croppa Creek for 40 years. I have been a wildlife carer, especially for koalas, for 30 years. Our farm will be impacted by future gas exploration.

I would like to compare our experience of industrialised farming with that of the disruption of gas extraction on community and farm production.

In one short decade, this district has seen the negative effects of massive corporate farming. Rarely do we see the consequences so quickly of broadscale vegetation clearing. The fragmentation of what is left continues. No compliance. Is the Pilliga to suffer the same fate? Our economy has suffered severely – soil has blown or washed away. Trees once provided microclimate and without that buffer, we have experienced dust storms, extreme heat and less rain. This district was once considered the Golden Triangle, but soil degradation means higher inputs and less productivity.

The water table seems to have dried up in this area as irrigation pivots ceased to move while it was still in drought. Trees watered by this source have suffered and many have died. Riverine areas have been cultivated too close to the rivers, and ancient Red River gums have died from climate extremes and chemical drift. The river gum is a primary koala food tree, and quality and quantity of leaf have been reduced. Water shortage is a fact of life now. Water extraction for mines and the risk of damage to aquifers is a price too high to pay. The carbon emissions from mining, especially methane, add to climate variation and intensity.

We have sustained heavy losses of koalas here in the last summer. Most were in poor condition, dehydrated and diseased when rescued. We believe bulldozers wiped out several colonies of koalas here since 2011, and refugees from that time dispersed into compressed habitats. There are two colonies of koalas in the Pilliga and we **MUST** protect them from a catastrophe such as this. Koalas are the “canaries in the coal mine” for all biodiversity. North west koalas are a unique gene pool. Their societies have been broken up causing functional extinction – that is, the young surviving koalas have lost the hierarchy of alpha males and females which create stability and sustainability.

Deadly chemicals further weaken drought affected trees. Koalas don’t eat all leaves from trees at all stages of the year, especially leaves tainted by chemicals or petrol fumes. They self medicate on a variety of leaves. Alarmingly, they are forced to eat poor quality, desiccated leaf and therefore lose condition and need to drink water. Some trees have been killed by over grazing by koalas in land locked habitats. Gas companies will not be able to quantify the damage caused to wildlife by fragmenting vegetation, burning off gases, and creating noise disturbance. More wildlife will naturally be killed with increased traffic and machinery. Our back roads are more like highways now, and this is more dangerous for our community and creates a biosecurity risk.

Large scale farming has reduced population and community spirit. There have been job losses with this high technology and most staff are now transient workers, renting what once were proud homesteads. The mines employ staff in the construction phase but leave a void of residents into the future. Our feeling of wellbeing is diminished in this environment.

The consequences of any intensive industry on this fragile, increasingly desertified landscape will be a poor legacy to leave for future generations. We need to follow the shift to biofuels and regenerative farming as a matter of urgency.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns.

A small dog sleeping in a basket

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