

Submission to the Independent Planning Commission Objection to the Vickery Extension Project

According to 'Lock the Gate', representing the concerns of farmers in the Boggabri district, the proposed Vickery Extension Project will have adverse effects on the local district, already stressed water resources, and climate change internationally.

They say the proposal is for an open cut coal mine producing 168 million tonnes of coal, at a rate of up to 10 million tonnes per year. This is a major mining activity.

I am objecting to the project on the following grounds:

- The Boggabri district is one of the most agriculturally productive areas in New South Wales. The land is a fertile cropping and livestock grazing resource, producing food and natural fibres important to domestic supply and sustainable export income. Any damage to the land and water resources in this area would have far-reaching impacts for the future.
- Building yet another water-hungry coal mine in the parched Namoi Valley would be a short-sighted decision, inappropriate at any time but particularly so during the current droughty conditions. Like the nearby Maules Creek coal mine, its demand for water would force the price for water up beyond the limit affordable for farming. Like the Maules Creek coal mine it would also be likely to result in pipelines being built to divert water from farming, and the risk of water being taken illegally. According to 'Lock the Gate' the Department of Planning has admitted the proposed extension is likely to run out of water during dry periods.
- During drought, when irrigation water is most needed for farming, competition from increased mining would lower sustainable food and fibre production and increase unemployment and financial hardship in the local community.
- Long-term rainfall records for NSW show that during the last 20 years, 50% less rain has fallen, compared to previous averages for the same duration. We need to adapt to this trend in climate change, not place increasing demands on an already stressed water supply.
- According to Lock the Gate, Narrabri Council has formally objected to the project, due to its social impacts on the Boggabri district, already reeling from the depopulation of farms by Whitehaven's nearby Maules Creek coal mine.

- According to Lock the Gate, Whitehaven proposes to pile mine spoil on top of 202 hectares of the Namoi alluvial aquifer, a plan the Department of Planning Industry and Environment's own Water Division has stated it does not support because the presence of acid forming materials in the spoil will mean heavy metals could leach into the aquifer below.
- According to Lock the Gate, one third of the mined coal will be thermal coal and will be burned for electricity overseas. Altogether, if it goes ahead, this mine will add 370 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere. At a time when NSW is still devastated by recent bushfires, and still mostly in drought, the State's community is increasingly conscious of the need to redress the effects of man-made climate change.
- According to Lock the Gate, the mine site includes the historic 'Kurrumbede' property, said to be the inspiration to Dorothea MacKeller's poem 'My Country'. Vibration from mine blasting will harm the homestead.
- According to Lock the Gate, the proposal includes a new rail connection that will cross the Namoi River and its floodplain. This has the potential to unpredictably change the patterns of flow of floodwater, and increase the risk of damaging flooding and erosion.