**Brian Keeler**

**Property 131a & 131b**

I am the owner of the property “Denison” with my wife Denise, which includes the above residences. The homes are located approximately 2300 metres from the proposed CHPP plant and 600 metres from the proposed rail spur. We are the second closest landholders to the project. We purchased the property in late 1997. At the time, Rio Tinto had ceased mining operations at the original Vickery mine and were undertaking rehabilitation. Prior to this, we had been living in Gunnedah but were looking for a home on acreage to raise our young family. As previous mining had ceased, “Denison” proved to be an excellent choice for us. On purchase, the property and its two homes were run down. Over the years, we repaired fencing, planted trees, updated the cottage, established a garden and, following council approval, undertook a major renovation and extension of the main homestead as an owner builder. We have both lived and worked in the area, conducted a small scale sheep grazing and lucerne business on the property and raised 4 children. “Denison” has provided us with a peaceful and idyllic lifestyle that many others envy. We were expecting to continue to live at “Denison” in our retirement and show our grandchildren the lifestyle their parents grew up with. If the Whitehaven Vickery Coal extension is approved, we believe we will no longer be able to live at “Denison” and have the lifestyle we envisaged into our retirement.

We met with Coalworks after they purchased a neighbouring property, “Kurrumbede” with a view to develop a mining operation. At this meeting, we were told that we would be adversely impacted by the much smaller mine that was proposed at that time, which was then known as the South Vickery mine and its infrastructure development. Now the new owners, Whitehaven have stated that the Vickery mine and the Vickery mine extension which will see coal extraction of 10 million tonne per annum and a 13 million tonne per annum washery, would not really affect us at all.

It has been determined in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that predicted operational noise levels will be exceeded for both 131a and 131b homes. For residence 131a, our family home this exceedance is expected to commence in the early life of the mine operation. While the NSW Voluntary Land Acquisition Policy (VLAMP) describes this exceedance as ‘negligible’, we believe this to be inaccurate due to the close proximity to the development. A senior Whitehaven executive gave a sarcastic response to me regarding the noise exceedance. He stated ‘you look like you have been around loud machinery, you probably won’t hear anything anyway’. This offensive comment trivialises the impacts of the proposal on my family, home and lifestyle. This comment is one of many similar comments we have heard from the same Whitehaven representative.

I want to bring to your attention two recent mining blasts that were felt at our home. Our house shook. The mine where the blasts took place is approximately 20km away. The proposed Vickery extension project is less than 2300 metres. I have periodically worked in a coal mine specifically in blasting operations for the past 15 years. As I have extensive experience working in the field, I do not have to imagine the impacts of a coal mine that is 2300 metres from our home – I already know that our home will be unliveable.

I have noise concerns with the rail spur. At other mines where I have worked, I can hear the squealing of the trains brakes as they are being loaded with coal. I can hear this at approximately 3 km away. The proposed Vickery Coal project predicts up to 16 rail movements a day and is in much closer proximity to our property. We believe the EIS is not a true indication of the potential noise impacts. The EIS modelling states our property already has a noise exceedance. Combining that with Whitehaven’s poor track record at their other mines in the area, with numerous breaches and underestimating noise levels is concerning.

The EIS model prediction suggests compliance for all air quality criteria although we believe this will not be the case. Other local landholders living further distances from other Whitehaven mine sites have reported dust, noise and dangerous fume events. We know that the dangerous fumes have the potential to drift up to 6 kilometres or more from the blast site, therefore being approximately 2300 metres away places us in a vulnerable position and will affect our health and wellbeing. The Planning Departments Assessment Report also acknowledges that acceptable levels of noise and dust according to the NSW government policy may not be acceptable to individual landholders living close to the mining project.

The attraction of “Denison” was the beautiful landscape of Gulligal Lagoon and neighbouring Kelvin Hills. If approval for this project is granted, our current landscape will be replaced with views of landforms, waste rock emplacement and mine infrastructure including the rail spur loop construction. The EIS states stationary work lights, fixed lights and vehicle mounted lights from the proposed mine development will be visible from our homes, and the lights from these sources can potentially produce sky glow. Therefore, we believe the constant lighting and sky glow will greatly impact on our quality of life. In addition, the EIS states the headlights of trains and lighting of the rail spur will be visible from our homes. We know through discussions with other landholders who live further distances from mine sites, that this has the potential to make our home unliveable.

The Independent Planning Commission (IPC) must consider the financial, social and lifestyle impacts on neighbouring landholders in handing down their decision on the Vickery Coal Extension and rail spur project. I respectfully urge the IPC not to approve this project. If the IPC approves the Vickery Coal Extension and rail spur, the IPC must insist there is a negotiated agreement for me and other adversely impacted properties before project approval.