Chairman, members of the IPC, Ladies & Gentlemen

Thank you for the opportunity to address the commission in regards to the Vickery Extension Project or more particularly the benefits that I see this Whitehaven Coal has brought to the Gunnedah Community.

My name is George Auma. I am 70 years old and have been a resident all my life having a farming business background until this day when I started farming citrus.

I initially prepared my speech in support of Whitehaven's Vickery Project in reference to my position as past president of the Gunnedah Show Society of which I am a life member. The experience gained through selling rural properties for 25 years.

During my tenure as president of the show society it was crucial that unless we could attract a major sponsor the longevity of the show was in doubt, which was the financial situation.

I approached the then CEO of Whitehaven Mr. Tony Hamper who did not hesitate to see the day Whitehaven took over the prime sponsor of an iconic and event that has been going for 128 years as we have an amicable working relationship.

Further to this Gunnedah Show Society was forced into a position whereby they had to demonstrate we could hold major events at the grounds in order to attract some identified $4 million of infrastructure that didn't comply with safety.

The Society established with the EIMEX Concept/innovation Energy & Mining Expo which was held in November with 40 major exhibitors. Whitehaven, thru Mr. Paul Flynn & Jamie Frodsham put their hand up to host the major sponsors exhibitors. It will now become a bi-annual event.

The inaugural event attracted 3,000 visitors and in preparation, we identified 85 businesses associated with the mining industry and raised $13,000 for local charities.
This culminated in the Society receiving $1.8 million of government funds which I believe EMEX contributed to.

To many, this may be perceived as a conflict of interest having rejected ongoing sponsorship deals from Whitehaven, but to the contrary it demonstrates their commitment to the Yarramalong Valley. I believe part of this mantra as an "Good Corporate Citizen"

It is also interesting to note that very few of the major agricultural properties or associated industries would entertain sponsorship of this magnitude, surprising as we are basically an agricultural show.

As mentioned in the speech I had prepared has been drastically altered after attending the Boggabri forum I was disheartened to hear the leader of the "environmental vandals" and not having "a social conscience" was loosely bandied around some of the speakers.

Firstly, let me say that in my position as a rural estate solicitor (specialising in rural properties) I witnessed many atrocity's committed by the rural sector over the 80's and early 90's, in particular.

In particular, stockwaste being tipped directly into regulated streams, pumping ag chemicals until they were not sustainable (will there be villages when dry?), indiscriminate chemical applying, ad-hoc development of tanks & storages across the many floodplains.

The catalyst that brought this to a halt was the issue with HELIX & ENOSPHOR which affected many cattle producers including myself.

Thankfully this has satisfactorily with the implementation of the Water Sharing Plans strict regulation, earth works and the cleaning of certain chemicals.

Conversely during this time I witnessed discrepancies with mining companies as I owned a property in an EL designated area. This included dubious rehabilitation practices, safety & noise issues not related to Whitehaven, New Bloomfield and Centennial Coal.
As previous speakers have said I have vivid memories when the coal mines & abattoirs closed. It was devastating for the town with thirty five vacant shops, a depressed real estate market, and the exodus of all our young people leaving to seek employment in other centres.

Our population dropped to 7,500 and there didn't seem any hope for recovery. I headed a venture capital group which tried to get an agricultural college located here but to no avail.

Unfortunately as the years progressed farms were amalgamating, sheep was getting larger, the yield of round bale cotton decreased, no cotton shipping and contract farming became the norm. Hence the employment in agriculture was diminishing.

The mines were a salvation in 2005 for along came jobs, business & resultant confidence. Confidence to build new homes, subdivisions were created and today we have a prosperous town with magnificent facilities.

This can also drastically complemented by the breaking of the drought & farmers once again farming in such a usually dry rainfall area.

In area and towns which is the envy of many inland towns who are envious of fruitful & quality resource we are blessed with and the resultant prosperity
Today like the farming fraternity, mining companies are strictly policed by not only Government bodies, monitoring systems, but also by groups of neighbours and the wider community who would not hesitate to "dred them in". The issue with water extraction was constantly addressed by speakers and although an expert I understand the obligations of the Water Sharing Plans and such licences. In order for Whitehaven to extract some 2,000 mgs of ground water or surface water, they would be required to first have the relevant licences. I find this in perspective is the equivalent of what a 300 hectare cotton farm would use. I must mention the foresight of Grunedah Council in not allowing FIFO camps in the area for it has brought certainly a optimum back into the market.

One of the my concerns are for those few genuine farmers namely the Barlows, Watto, McClure, Barley who get caught up in scenarios like these. To highlight say as Mr Warwick Johnston stated that they are called the damage is no consolation that I have confidence that although it may not be their preferred outcome a realistic solution must be obtained for them to move forward.

To conclusion may I reaffirm my support for the project and hope that the scientific evidence provided satisfies the criteria. For without doubt we have no base metals to gauge. Project of the sensitivity of Grunedah Basin having the highest quality coal and mined by what I believe is a good corporate citizen. Should ensure that "best practices will apply that the project will be done right".