

Good Afternoon, thank you for this opportunity to speak. Today I would like to briefly talk about my experience as a neighbour to a Whitehaven coal mine.

My family have a cattle property alongside the Whitehaven Werris Creek coal mine site, and I wish to highlight from the start, that to this point in time today, I don't have any noted loss of water on our property. But I am a member of the broader local community that is desperately seeking answers from both Whitehaven and the Government regarding many landholders recorded loss of water bore reliability - both stock and domestic, and irrigation bores across the Quipolly aquifer basin.

I am in great fear of my farms future with the noted depletion of water resources in the basin. Over the last few years there have been anecdotal evidence of excess water being reported on the Werris Creek mine site, with extra and previously unplanned evaporation methods brought into action over many years, to get rid of an abundance of pit water. Whitehaven have been fortunate enough to have such an abundance of water that they recently were able to expand their business into agriculture, with a large pivot irrigator now alongside the mine site, spinning round and round irrigating crops for hay making, whilst many neighbours alongside have long abandoned their irrigated cropping businesses.

Our family attempted to sell our property about 4 years ago and the interest from the market place was high, but potential buyers concern was all about water reliability with the then developing local news of excess water in the mine pit, and neighbours now variable reliability of water bores. Today there are 1/2 dozen properties openly for sale and stagnant on the market, with many more looking to bring their properties on the market for sale. The water licences attached within this small irrigation zone are now on paper virtually worthless.

The pressure this situation puts on individuals and their family's is incalculable. Many farmers have had to destock property's at a moment's notice once bores no longer deliver water, and many have had excess cost burden thrust upon them from having to drill deeper and deeper to seek new water sources in different locations.

Many of these individuals have had to become experts overnight in non-chosen subjects of study. These people are working pro bono in areas that government and proponent company's choose to ignore. I personally know of dozens of local farmers and individuals who have spent countless thousands of hours unpaid, working to learn and understand what these developments might possibly mean to their most valuable tangible asset - being their farms and homes.

It's the learning and pushback of local farmers and community's, again all pro bono work, that are actually shaping and influencing the conditions that these developments are established by. If these farmers today, and those for example of the Shenhua coal development had not pushed back on many of the aspects of these developments, would approved mines have the conditions they do?

There isn't much - if any - faith left in the community in the independence of planning consent, or that of the planning department. I myself have had to personally intervein in my local Community consultative committee attached to the Werris Creek mine as a neighbour but outside observer. I have spent more than a year now in back and forth communication with the department of planning about the CCC and the proper guidelines and standards that should be used for running the Committee. I as an individual have pushed the departments own rules into their view and seen changes to the running of that CCC, from the outside. Why should I have to have had to do that?

How many countless hours of free work is being done by community's around the northwest and NSW by disaffected communities of these mega developments? How does this extra burden randomly placed on people's lives, affect their lives and wellbeing? From the initial stages of pre planning of developments, to living alongside these sites, how are the neighbours lives enhanced?

The amount of stress, anxiety and the mental health of individuals associated with these pitched battles is my greatest concern with these developments. How is our mental health even part of the consideration of these developments. Is it even an aspect of concern?

The Social Impact Assessment acknowledges that anxiety is a widespread mental health concern in Australia, but this should not be allowed to be a smokescreen to conceal the additional very severe burden of stress imposed on communities by the financial risk, pollution concerns, loss of water and the need to constantly respond to Approval Modifications which occur regularly throughout the life of these mines. This is especially the case due to the lack of access to what they call "management information". The reversing of the burden of proof thrusts mine neighbours into a situation where they have to prove breaches of conditions such as blasting violations and noise exceedances without the evidence they need. Indeed, the Department of Planning and EPA are also known to have difficulty obtaining information.

Reviewing the complaints register associated with these mega coal mines, or the issues raised in Community consultative committees, just shows some of the many aspects communities have to put up with in their lives living alongside these working mine sites. I would like to see genuine respect and acknowledgement of community's broader health, wellbeing and mental health, being taken into the highest consideration and priority, over - at best - potential profits of large multinational company's.