

I was born in Boggabri and grew up with the hype about the coal resources of the area. My family has been involved in irrigated agriculture at Boggabri since the 1960s and I have a passion for the environment and the agricultural productivity of the Namoi Valley.

I was at school when the original Vickery Coal Mine opened and remember very little being taught or discussed in school at the time about the environmental challenges associated with mining. Global warming and Climate Change were starting to become an issue with climate scientists but were not yet part of public debate or even the considerations for coal mine approvals.

Neither were groundwater removal and contamination by mining activities recognised as major issues for the community. The mines were relatively small scale and any properties adjacent to a mine suffering localised groundwater impacts were purchased by the mining companies to 'mitigate' the damage.

Many farming families will depart mining areas as their properties become affected by mining activities and are unlikely to return once mining has exhausted the coal resource. Rural communities rely on families to remain viable and mining has certainly contributed to the drain of farming families from rural areas where mining occurs.

Thankyou for the opportunity to comment of the Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed expansion to the Vickery Coal Mine near Boggabri. I have a number of concerns with development, particularly around the impacts to groundwater and the Namoi River, impacts to neighbouring landholders and the communities of Boggabri, Gunnedah and Narrabri, the repercussions of the project for climate change, how the process of returning the site to full agricultural production post mining will look, and how the Whitehaven company culture is expressed operationally and ultimately their social licence to operate.

Mining requires a great deal of water and, like agriculture, the amount needed will vary depending on the season. Drier years will see increased water demand and usage and a reduction in groundwater recharge. The needs of the community for water include domestic use, water for stock and water for irrigating crops and pastures, as well as what is required for the environment. The proponent for the Vickery mine is proposing build a borefield to extract groundwater from the Upper Namoi Alluvium to satisfy its requirements. During the last dry period Zone 5 Upper Namoi Groundwater users north of Boggabri triggered extraction reductions designed to protect the water resource. Zone 4, where the Vickery mine will be extracting water is subject to the same guidelines and potentially same reductions.

What steps will Whitehaven take to ensure that they do not breach environmental approvals in dry years when water is scarce. The installation of a borefield will not allow them to pump if the whole zone has been cutback, will the mine be required to match production with water availability like the farming businesses in the local area? Simply going to the water market may not provide for their requirements and will force up the price of water for local water users, as we have already seen with Whitehaven and other local mining ventures bidding up the price of temporary water three times the historical value and pricing food and fibre producers out of the market. What will be the impact of extracting groundwater from the Namoi Alluvium in that particular location on the neighbouring farms. What will be the impact on the Namoi River of that extraction, the river is a gaining and losing stream and is interconnected with the alluvium throughout its length.

Any contamination of the groundwater or surface water will have ramifications for all the types of use mentioned above and the environment, especially the home water use and water for stock, but longer term irrigation of soil with poor quality water will detrimentally effect soil health and

productivity. Allowing the mine to release contaminated water into the environment during or after even relatively small rainfall events will cause contamination. If the mine cannot be designed and engineered to collect and hold all water that falls into its mining area then the project should not be allowed to proceed on the scale they are contemplating. Impacting negatively on the health of the environment and the local community is not acceptable in any other industry, why should it be for extractive industries?

Being a neighbour to the Maules Creek mining complex I have seen and heard the effects of mining production especially when things go wrong. Toxic red brown blast gasses, blast explosions that have spooked cattle and worried people, constant dust clouds, movement of heavy machinery, increased vehicle traffic. Maules Creek Coal Mine, also owned by Whitehaven Coal, has had a poor track record with numerous upheld complaints when it comes to compliance with its approval conditions. The company has had to apply for modifications to change their operating permit further reducing the protections for the local environment and people. What is the point of regulators applying strict conditions to approvals only to have them watered down because the mining company has no desire to work within them?

With many governments and large companies now looking to exit fossil fuels in favour of renewables, what is the reasoning behind approving another coal mine? I imagine most if not all the coal extracted will be sent to Asian markets and not used domestically so it is not part of a domestic reserve. The emissions resulting from extracting, transporting and burning the coal mined at Vickery will add to the total for NSW, it is difficult to see how we will reach zero net emissions by 2050 when projects like Vickery are in the pipeline.

At the conclusion of the mining operation how will the mine site be rehabilitated to return the area to its previous productive potential from an agricultural perspective. Pit Voids are known to become groundwater sinks that drain water from nearby aquifers until equilibrium is achieved. Apart from draining the nearby water sources, the water in the mine void will continue to evaporate concentrating salt in the water body in perpetuity.

For all these reasons I oppose the approval of the Vickery Extension. The health of our environment is too valuable to trade for short term gain. The perception by mining companies that they can challenge any restrictions on their operations once they are operating shows regulators do not have the power to manage these large multinational operators.