

22.09.2016

To: **The Agriculture and Environment Committee & Staff,**

Mr Glenn Butcher MP, Member for Gladstone, Chair  
Mr Tony Perrett MP, Member for Gympie, Deputy Chair  
Mrs Julieanne Gilbert MP, Member for Mackay  
Mr Robbie Katter MP, Member for Mount Isa  
Mr Jim Madden MP, Member for Ipswich West  
Mr Ted Sorensen MP, Member for Hervey Bay  
Mr Rob Hansen, Research Director  
Mr Paul Douglas, Principal Research Officer  
Ms Marion O'Connor, Acting Committee Support Officer

Dear Ladies & Gentlemen,

Re: **Environmental Protection (Underground Water Management) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill & Mining / Farming Families**

I have written to some of you independently prior to making this submission, so my apologies for any double ups. My letter writing is to do as much as I can to share our story, the local story, about the very real impacts this amendment may have on my family and many other Mining / Farming Families.

My name is Dianne Kemshead, my husband's name is Jamie and we have four children (three girls, Allissiana, Chance, Willow & a little boy called Patterson, his nick name of course is 'Banjo'). I share the names of my family with you so you'll know exactly who it is that I'm talking about when I say I'm concerned about the impacts this amendment may have if not handled delicately and sensibly.

Mining / Farming Families isn't a corny play on words or a handy catch phrase, it's just three words I use and I've heard used a lot to describe rural families that work in the mining industry. I'm not talking about engineers with hobby farms or executives with retirement blocks in the hills with a view... I am talking about real rural families that have tried to supplement the farming income by seeking employment outside of the industry so as to bring that income back to the farm. It's that income that fills the gaps during the market slumps, changes in industry standards or regulation and of course through lengthy droughts.

Both my husband's family and mine used to live over 200 KMs west of Charleville in western Qld in the Mulga country and now call the Darling Downs home. Due to health issues in the family, many years of drought, ever increasing running costs and sliding market prices we have relocated to the Darling Downs for a fresh start. My husband & I have a small property north of Chinchilla where we cull graze the last of our Brahman cows from out west; I have a small machinery hire business that I try to run from home on the farm while my husband works away.

Jamie doesn't work away and I don't work almost 24/7 here at home so that we can go on annual holidays, drive fancy cars or buy new things all the time. We do this to build something for our kids, we do this to pay off debt from nearly a decade in drought ravaged conditions out west, and we do this so that we can have that life that contributes to what Australia and Queensland has always been based on... rural production.

Much to our sadness and only out of necessity Jamie has set up a little house near Oakey and he now works for a coal company called New Hope Group. As you may be aware they have a mine north of town and between it, the meat works and the Army they are the parts of industry that keep the region afloat, the communities alive and families in the area. There's lots of beef and dairy cattle there too, but those operations, at least the smaller to mid-size ones are running to just keep themselves afloat. The farms don't make massive profits and rarely have very much capital at all left to invest in much more than the running costs of the properties and the living expenses of the family. There's less and less money every year for new fences, improved sheds & yards for stock handling and there is next door to no money for staff.

The average age of folks on the land is higher than ever, I think it 60 or older. There are very few young people looking to stay on the land and those that do often have an unrealistic picture of what the lifestyle and the pay packet is going to be. We don't stay on the land to be hero's, we do it because we love it, but also because if we don't do it... who will?

It is near on impossible to get into the industry without either taking on or inheriting enormous debt, and there's rarely much money to exit the industry and retire or launch into something else due to the almost constant debt levels. Life on the land is hard going, very hard going and knocks the hell out of a lot of people... and I will resist digressing into suicide in the bush or accidents on farms... as that is a whole other ongoing tragedy.

We see Jamie most weekends, but not every weekend, and if there was work closer we'd gladly have him home every night. After the massive down turn here in CSG industry and with commitments still to a family partnership we not only have our little family to manage & support but also Jamie's parents in retirement. By the way this partnership has served at least three and almost four generations of his family and allowed kids to grow up on the land, families to build homes and the oldies to retire... we're kind of proud of it actually and had ill health and a decade of drought not come along I think there's a chance we'd still be out in the western country.

Key to that family partnership, this family and our future on the land is Jamie's job, a mining job... he doesn't want to be away from home any more than we want him to be, but the rural industry these days is almost impossible without some form of off farm income to ride out the tough patches. We've chosen this life and we love it, but we're starting to think it might be at even greater risk because decisions might get made about our futures that could have enormous impacts on us, without people actually knowing about those impacts or why we do what we do.

Folks, we don't want handouts and we're not trying to have a whinge, god knows you must get enough of that. We're not trying to tell you how to do your jobs, I'd imagine you get

plenty of that too; but you need to know the reality of possible delays and uncertainty that this amendment may cause.

You need to understand (with full respect) that we're real hard workers and we're happy to keep working, but we need to know that it's not all for nothing. We need to know that you'll consider everyone when making these decisions and not just a few. We have no issue with people having their own opinion, you have yours, we have ours, and the folks that want to see the mine delayed or shut down have and are welcome to theirs. This isn't about opinions, this is about knowing the facts on the ground from the entire community, and in the most part from those members of the community who normally don't jump up and down and carry on.

Everything, absolutely everything I see, hear and read suggests that if New Hope don't get their approval OR if they do get it but have to wait many many months more for a water licence... in the current coal market... they as a company will have to take action to see they can remain viable at this location. I run a business, so have some or all of you... we'd do the same. And how does that work? Does Jamie go first because he hasn't been there as long as others, or is the older guys... some of those blokes have been with New Hope for 25 years and where do they go after that? This isn't a company with massive staff turnover, but they will be forced to cut numbers if they run out of coal and have no work for the men long periods of time.

Will New Hope keep buying locally to support the towns, investing locally and sponsoring the hundreds of things that none of the little communities can find money for any more? All the little halls, school upgrades, toilets, sporting teams, Men's shed, Cultural groups and the list is endless of where hundreds and thousands of dollars is poured into every little corner to keep things ticking along. The towns are struggling to survive under their own steam, look at any town in regional Queensland; Australia for that matter and you will find example after example of gradual decline... but not so much Oakey and surrounding districts.

My husband gets calls from everyone from bowling clubs to camp draft associations, from the CWA, the folks running R U OK day, rodeo committees, and horse sales, the local hospital and even Lifeflight & the Cancer Council. I've listened as they navigate through forming partnerships to benefit the community and demonstrate that New Hope is a group of people and not just a company badge.

If the farmers get laid off from delays in the approvals process, the farming families will struggle and/or have to try and send one of the parents even further away to earn that supplementary income. They've been able to be better managers of their farms because they don't need to push the country, the crops and the animals harder than they can handle... which most folks know is one huge contributor to drought and failing rural operations. Country needs a spell, cows need to be able to grow up properly before you join, and the people (our kids) need to be eased into working on the land and not be getting hurt in the yards or the paddock because they were too young to be there but got involved anyway. And so too the mums, the dads and the oldies, they need to be able to call it a day when they are past working in the elements, or in the dark or doing days too long to mention.

And what of the local contractors whose work is dominated by New Hope work that may in turn have to lay off staff, AND if its anything like the impacts of the CSG companies tightening their belts, a lot of the little companies have either gone bust or left town.

And then what of the towns... see it's not just Oakey that sees those firsthand benefits from local mining / farming families, it's Kulpi, Quinalow, Goombungee, Haden, Kingsthorpe, Brymaroo, Bowenville, Dalby and even Toowoomba. The impacts will go even further than that but it will be those little towns that could soon have more empty houses, more empty workshops, less people down the street, less people at events and it goes on and on.

These things are a very good chance of happening because the industry that has supported these towns for a hundred years, the rural industry, is on it's last legs. Farmers are old or aging, debts are huge, workloads are endless and the love affair with the land is breaking. Sure we've had great rain this week, the paddocks are green and the cows are fat... the crops will go ahead and those cows are bringing top dollar; but running costs on farms are huge, staffing is expensive or non-existent and there is just nowhere near the amount of people in these districts that there ever used to be.

Folks I don't want to be all gloom and doom, but this is the reality that we've seen before and sadly expect to see happen again. I don't want to go through all that down here and I couldn't imagine anyone else does either. I'm happy to be getting up early to get the kids down to the bus, happy to move the cows on my own and run the farm pretty well on my own; I try to run the business off my phone and computer even if it means late nights keeping up with paper work and missing special milestones with my kids. I cook and I clean, I wash and I mow, I muster and pump water, I drive the truck & machinery when I have to and do almost anything that I have to really... and I do it because that's what needs to be done.

My husband is the same, and more. He's the rock for this family, always has been and probably always will be. He's certainly not backward in stepping up or helping out, and I think that kinda runs in the family. My mother in law was UGA & Agforce for years and the grandfather was Shire Chairman for over three decades out west. I tell you that not skite, I'm proud of my family and this family that I've married into; I tell you that so that you know we understand what it means to be the person or people at the front representing others. I couldn't do your job, I don't want to do your job, I just want to help.

My husband is the youngest of three brothers, but he is the big brother really, one of the other two died young and the remaining one has had his challenges... Jamie ran the country out west when his folks started to struggle and for years now he's been Land man for resource companies, manager & mentor. He guides me here on the farm, helps me with the business and leads by example in his behaviour and conduct. His kids idolise him and mates cherish him and he'll keep doing the work away from home for as long as we need him to. He's a good man and I think we're a good family, and we're not alone... But if this mine at Oakey gets pulled up or delayed any further then he and plenty other farming mums and dads could be out of a job... and there's not too many other jobs to jump into at the moment so the impacts here at home will be considerable to say the very least.

I write to you because if I don't and all these tough times arrive, I'll never know if I could've helped things go in a more positive direction. I don't know you, but maybe you know a little more about me now, about us... and I think we have plenty to share with you.

I write you because even though we don't live right beside the mine – the loss of that mine and those jobs will have as big an effect on us as it will on those families. I write you as I suspect I will continue to write others that don't have the time to get to every little town and country corner to see what real rural Queensland looks like at the moment, and what a vital part the resource industry plays in keeping those towns and farming lives afloat.

I write you because I understand you have a tough job, but also that you can't and probably never claim to know everything... and how can you? You have a massive role with enormous responsibility and if we can help you do your job by telling you our story... then that has to be a good thing.

I write to you for our little family; just as I suspect the partners of those 300 other New Hope workers and the many surrounding & supporting businesses will also write to people whose jobs and opinions carry more weight than ours. I write you in the same way the 40 other farming families that rely on the mine write to share their story, offer their opinion and ask that they not be forgotten when it comes to making a call and getting the mine expansion approved and keeping the crews working, the towns going and the farms producing... any more delays will start to cost jobs and seriously impact lives.

Please be sure that you have all the facts, please be sure to understand the fullest extent of the decisions you make and that you are aware of length and depth of the contribution the mine, it's employees and their families make. Please don't drag this out any longer than it has to be and please don't create a situation where it easier for big business to go elsewhere than it is to stick it out in regional Queensland.

We are so keen to provide you all the context, history and information you need. We don't want these next steps to be taken without you having the opportunity to ask questions, to come and visit for yourselves and see just how many people are pro big industry and agriculture working together. And we want you to see that for the vast majority of people in the area it is working really well right now.

Thank you for your time – have a nice day.

Please don't forget about us...  
All the best;

Dianne Kemshead

