

 <p>brisbaneresidentsunited.org</p>	<p>Brisbane Residents United Inc PO Box 3898 South Brisbane Q 4101 www.brisbaneresidentsunited.org president@brisbaneresidentsunited.org.au</p>
--	--

7th October 2016
Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
Sent via email only: aec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

Re: Submission to Committee on Environmental Protection (Underground Water Management) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to your inquiry into the Environmental Protection (Underground Water Management) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 (Bill).

This submission is made on behalf of Brisbane Residents United, Brisbane's peak body for community resident actions groups. Whose purpose is to:

- Represent Brisbane and surrounding district residents and provide them with a united voice Governments on matters pertaining to urban planning and development.
- Act as a resource centre, facilitating information sharing across established and start-up local resident associations.

We are presently participating as members of a community committee in the drafting of the South East Queensland Regional Plan and welcome this opportunity to comment on Water Management issues in Queensland. Water is literally the stuff of life and it is an increasingly valuable asset. We do not fully understand how our underground water system works and yet we seem eager to allow exploitation where the unintended consequences are worse than we could possibly image and in some cases devastating to nearby residents.

Already all over Queensland are hundreds if not thousands of unregulated bores. Our climate appears to be changing with extreme temperatures and long summers. We have experienced both extremely lengthy droughts and conversely severe flooding conditions. Queensland's economy is heavily reliant on agriculture as a major employer, local supplier and exporter. Australia is known and respected worldwide for the abundance and quality of its produce. This is not a reputation that we as a state or a country can afford to either squander for short term gain or take for granted.

We should be husbanding our water resources very carefully with an eye to our future as well as present requirements. Water wars are already being fought in other parts of the world and we live on the driest continent on the planet. We can no longer afford to waste water as we have in the past, as we have many important and varied calls on this valuable resource and that includes our environment. We have experience of the social and environmental damage caused by resource and mining companies as a result of their careless use of our water resources. We already have many drilling sites that have not been properly sealed that are causing problems now that will only get much worse in the future.

Our recommendations are:

- 1) **No resource company should get free, unlimited access to groundwater when extracting coal or gas, because it is risky to the environment and risky and unfair to other water users such as farmers.** The current laws giving such rights to gas companies ought to be changed. The plans of the current and former State governments to create a 'statutory right to take associated groundwater' for mining companies need to be rejected for the same reasons. For openness, transparency and accountability, a licence should always be required prior to groundwater being taken or interfered with, with public submission and appeal rights to an independent Court with powers of final determination.
- 2) **The improvements proposed in the Bill by the current State government to the groundwater impact assessment for projects at the environmental authority stage are good, necessary and supported.** Those improvements include a requirement for the applicant to provide more information as to the proposed impacts from their use of underground water, including detailing each aquifer likely to be affected and analysis of those aquifers, impacts on the quality of underground water, and identification of the environmental values that will or may be affected and proposed strategies to avoid or mitigate these impacts. Functional, clean groundwater resources are essential to many Qld farmers, businesses and ecosystems.
- 3) **The current government's proposal that mines obtain an 'associated water licence' if they have not gone through the improved groundwater impact assessment introduced by the Bill is positive.** This would mean the public submission and appeal rights would continue to apply to large, risky coal mines like Adani Carmichael and Hancock Alpha coal mines. Those proposed mines pose serious potential groundwater impacts that might affect natural areas and landholders who depend on groundwater. However, see above, licensing ought to be required in relation to all mining and gas projects not just older proposals. Also, see below, the licensing needs to be assessed against ESD principles.
- 4) **The Bill needs to be amended so that the 'associated water licence' is assessed against the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD principles) as necessary for every other water licence assessment.** ESD principles include the precautionary principle –in effect that if we do not understand the likely results of the proposed impacts sufficiently, we should not allow the activity to be undertaken. Current legislation in force does require assessment against ESD principles as part of all water license assessment. The effects of impacts to our groundwater basins are often uncertain, and must be assessed against the ESD principles.

The decisions we make today can adversely affect not only our generation but many generations to come. We acknowledge that there are competing interests that require access to water but we are concerned that resource and mining companies have been treated as special cases for far too long. The time for such special treatment is long past and indeed to continue in this way would be irresponsible and a dereliction of the duty that a government owes to its entire people.

We would like the opportunity to appear before the Committee in their hearing into this inquiry. Should you require any further information I can be contacted on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Handley
President, Brisbane Residents United Inc