



7^h 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**).

1. This bill is important to me because it is a justice issue. The 'statutory right' to withdraw ground water must be repealed. Groundwater that belongs to us all, and to the future generations, cannot be a 'right' of any person, business, or company.

The withdrawal of the water must be based on principles of Ecological Sustainability, that is, authority to withdraw only what can be PROVEN can be replenished in the near term, and PROVEN to do no harm in the interim. Water stored in aquifers is critical for a variety of reasons. Not only do aquifers form a huge mass of accessible fresh water, they are also free from impurities.

Rain (or snow in some places)) runs into lakes, rivers, ocean, or into aquifers. However much of the freshwater that runs into lakes, and rivers become polluted, and that which runs into the oceans mixes with saltwater. Aquifers store water that is not contaminated or polluted. When the water flows down to the aquifer, sand filters the water out of the pollutants. Bacteria do not grow in aquifers and the water remains fresh for use. Again, there is no loss of the water stored in the aquifer to evaporation.

Aquifers have always been critically important in sustaining human habitation, agriculture, and irrigation. Many civilizations and settlements have been established and sustained around aquifers. In many areas, where there are no rivers, lakes, or streams, aquifers are the only source of freshwater. The aquifers in Queensland are a reliable source of water, and we will depend more and more on them as the effects of climate change make other water sources less dependable.

It is foolish to waste this pristine resource on a short term, and unnecessary resource such as mining, when it is currently needed for food production, and the necessity to secure our food production will become even more obvious over time. We have substitutes for coal and gas, but no substitute for food.

2. The Precautionary Principle implies that there is a social responsibility for decision makers (Government) to protect the people, both now and future generations, as well as the environment including the fauna and flora it supports and the ecological services the

environment provides. There is no substitute for these. If there is any possibility that allowing the withdrawal of this water will deplete aquifers, or create environmental harm in its disposal, then where there is doubt, it cannot be approved.

The Bill must reflect this.

The consequences of rising salinity, reduced groundwater access for other users, and ecosystems must be acknowledged, and the burden of proof that these impacts are inconsequential lies with the proponent. There must be sound evidence that a Water Licence or Associated Water Licence will do no harm. There is little chance that claims in this respect made by coal and gas companies are credible.

3. Further amendments to the Bill must include consideration of mines that are in the transition stage, such as Alpha and Carmichael. At a time when we must be reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, it seems a nonsense to be approving new coal mines.

At the very least, these mines **MUST** comply with stringent legislation that does not support the free ride that coal companies have come to consider their due. The Associated Water Licenses these companies must obtain needs to consider the Precautionary Principle and those of Ecologically Sustainable Development as discussed previously.

4. The Bill must reflect openness and accountability, with proper time for submissions by the public prior to any water being taken. This must apply to 'Water Licenses' and 'Associated Water Licenses'. The current time for submission is too short, sometimes 21 days, and any member of the public must be able to comment in a submission regardless of where they live. As discussed, the water resources belong to us all, and the use and loss of this water will affect us all, now and into the future. The effects of withdrawal of huge volumes of water from our groundwater basins are often uncertain, and must be assessed against the ESD principles. The public must retain the right to challenge any decisions relating to our water through an independent arbiter, namely a politically independent justice system.

I would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee in their hearing into this inquiry should you be so inclined. I live in Mackay, but could travel to Brisbane for an important decision such as this, or could be available via skype, phone or similar.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Carlisle