

7th October, 2016

Dear Members of the Agriculture and Environment Committee,

RE: SUBMISSION - Environmental Protection (Underground Water Management) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill

I am an employee at New Acland Coal Mine and a local beef cattle farmer in the region. My family has, for four generations now, farmed at Maclagan and Peranga – two regions in very close proximity to the mine.

After gaining a trade qualification, I made the decision in 2003 to return to my parents' dairy farm at Maclagan to help repair the damage wrought by deregulation of the industry. Both my wife and I returned to the farm with a long-term view of succession and a dream of one day calling my family's farm our own. However, constant decreases in the farm price paid for milk eventually moved this dream out of reach for me, my wife and our three children.

In 2011, my parents, my wife and I, made the heartbreaking decision to disperse the dairy and cease milk production. In order for me to keep the farm, I was forced to seek off-farm employment. I was lucky enough to gain employment as a machinery operator at the nearby Acland Coal Mine. When I accepted this position, I had viewed it as a short-term job option. I was not sure the mining industry was something I wanted to be associated with in the long term. Five years later, having witnessed first-hand New Hope Group's dedication to land regeneration, commitment to limiting environmental impacts and sincerity to working with local landholders, I can honestly now say I am proud to be an New Acland Coal Mine worker. I would even add, that I would strongly consider buying grazing land New Acland may eventually put up for sale.

The income I derive from my job at the mine has allowed me to convert my farm into a modest beef and cropping enterprise. The flexibility of my work roster also allows me to help my parents (who are in their 60s) with their farm and my great-uncle at Peranga (in his 80s) with his farm also. Both these farms are primary sources of income for my relatives and would cease to operate if I were not able to help out on my days off. My farm (like so many in the region) is not quite big enough for my family to sustain a reasonable living from farming it.

For now, my ultimate dream of purchasing my parents' home farm remains out of reach. My parents are now looking to sell their farm - the place where my grandfather, father and I all grew up - so they can finally retire. We are unable to commit to its succession as we do not know if I will have a job at the mine after 2017. Without this supplementary income, we will not be able to afford to buy it. And unfortunately, there are very few alternative employment opportunities in this district.

If Stage 3 is not approved, my wife and I will be forced to sell our farm and relocate. I fear my parents and great uncle will also be forced to sell their farms also because they will be unable to manage the work that needs to be undertaken to keep their businesses profitable without having us close by to help out as the seasons require.

Having become such good friends with so many of the people I work with at Acland, I know there are many young farming families whose stories are so similar to my own. Some of these people have been awaiting an outcome on their futures, hopeful for a Stage 3 approval, for nine years. I've been waiting for five, desperately hoping the outcome will be in our favour. I fear the recent changes to the water lease legislation will cause only more delays. I worry that people will have to lose their jobs before a decision is reached.

Please consider the perspectives of mine-employed farmers such as myself by considering this a grandfather's case.

I would be happy to meet with you in person or to show you around our farm in the future, so you can see the positive impact New Acland Coal Mine has for my family.



Dale Collins

