

Friday 07th 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**).

I am a concerned citizen who was born and mostly raised in Queensland. I am proud of the fact that Queensland has a strong farming industry and spectacular environmental tourist sites. I do not want to see either of these features impacted by the mining industry and I certainly do not believe mining companies deserve unlimited access to groundwater. I am satisfied with explanations from the Environmental Defenders' Office outlining concerns in detail:

- 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.

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Yours sincerely

Mauricia Armitage