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The Research Director
Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000
By email to: AREC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Mineral and Energy Resources (Common Provisions) Bill 2014

I am the Queensland Campaign Coordinator for the Lock the Gate Alliance (LTG) and am authorised to make this submission on its behalf. Lock the Gate is a national grassroots organisation made up of about 200 local groups and more than 30,000 supporters. It is a unique coalition of farmers, conservationists and Traditional Owners opposed to inappropriate coal and gas mining.

Lock the Gate is making this submission because we are concerned that our individual members, supporters and communities will be adversely affected by the proposed changes.

The proposed changes will mean far fewer people will be able to object to mining leases and landholders' rights will be weakened. The system is already stacked against landholders and communities and this will make it even worse.

Even small mines may last for decades and have serious impacts on our finances, environment and society. Public objection rights are powerful rights which enable an objector to have their argument heard in court, unlike mere consultation. Public objection rights to proposed mines are essential to enable the costs and benefits to be debated openly in Court and to deter the type of corruption exposed in New South Wales. We strongly submit that existing rights under Queensland law must not be changed.

It is vital that full objection rights are maintained to ensure that the public interest in the future of Queensland is given a voice. Otherwise, we are handing over our public interests and common rights to foreign-owned mining companies and their shareholders, allowing all the costs and impacts to be incurred on local communities and allowing all the benefits to be shipped offshore. Current legal rights are essential to ensure that the basic public interest is allowed to be explored in a court of law.

In summary, we believe coal and unconventional gas mining as currently practiced are not safe and the regulations which apply are vastly inadequate. Coal and gas extraction is undermining our foodbowls, water, health and communities. They are costing Australians more in higher energy prices, reduced property values and government subsidies.

So we **oppose the changes** proposed in the following clauses.

- Clauses 418 and 420
These clauses **remove existing community notification rights and rights to object to mining lease applications**. Changing land tenure to allow for mining rather than another land use could impact on a broad section of the public. Therefore the narrow definition of an 'affected person' proposed, which would exclude neighbours or community groups or people in the water catchment, is absurd. Land use decision making processes for other industries provide for community submission and appeal rights, so there is no good reason why mining tenure should be exempt from this basic standard.

- Clause 245
Limiting community notification and formal objection rights to the Land Court to “site specific” environmental authorities will, in conjunction with the above clauses, **remove all existing public rights to lodge formal objections to the Land Court in up to 90% of mining projects**¹ in Queensland. This is unacceptable and fails to recognise the positive impact of community objection rights. The same mining companies who want to limit public objections are often foreign owned. Suggestions by State government Ministers that objectors lodge frivolous or vexatious cases is entirely untrue, rather the opposite is true: there are no examples of such cases and objectors are very responsible. In the Alpha coal case (2014) the land holders and conservation group exposed that the mining company had a lack of hard data on groundwater impacts.
- Clause 423 and 424
It is inappropriate to restrict matters that the Land Court can consider and give these powers, such as to consider the ‘public interest’, to the Minister. Decreasing judicial oversight, increasing ministerial powers and shutting out community participation has **worrying implications for corruption**. The Independent Commission Against Corruption in NSW has identified merits appeal rights for the public as a crucial measure to curtail corruption, because a decision-maker that knows any decision they make can be tested in court has to ensure the decision is made well and in accordance with the law.
- Clause 429
Removal of restricted land status when the miner is granted exclusive surface rights to access land removes one of the few rights of vulnerable landholders. No-one should have the land surrounding their house destroyed by an open-cut mine yet this would be possible under this clause.

We call on the Committee to approach the proposed legislation with a view to empower, rather than disempower, our communities to take responsibility for our State. In Queensland for decades any person or group has been entitled to object to any mining proposal in open court, to have the evidence scrutinised about the benefits and detriments of a proposed mine. I request that you do not accept these changes but instead keep existing provisions that require public notification of all proposed mining projects and that allow any person or incorporated group to object to all mining leases and environmental authorities on all the existing grounds.

Consultation Process prior to the Bill reaching Parliament

Please ask Minister Cripps to provide exact figures on how many of the 176 submitters to the discussion paper opposed changes to existing objection rights and detailed examples of alleged cases of vexatious objections. According to EDO Qld, at least 106 submissions of a total of 176 submissions on the discussion paper, from both rural and urban submitters, opposed the changes. Yet Minister Cripps does not report this key fact in p47-48 of the explanatory notes.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Dennehy
Queensland Campaign Coordinator
Lock the Gate

¹ Discussion paper, p 7.