

Oakey Coal Action Alliance comments on the Regional Planning Interests Bill 2013

17 January 2014

Submission 053
17 January 2014
11.1.14

Submission to:

The Research Director
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The OCAA is an incorporated community group whose members are opposed to the Stage 3 expansion of the New Acland Coal mine (NAC) on the Darling Downs, near Oakey Queensland. This revised expansion will involve mining a total 5000 ha (with Stages 1 and 2) of Class A agricultural land. The mine output is currently 4.8 mtpa and will increase to 7.5mtpa if the modified

Stage 3 is approved. OCAA is deeply concerned about the loss of many hundreds of hectares of Strategic Cropping Land at Acland and the potential for industrial development (CSG and mining) impacting more of Queensland's best agricultural land such as the Darling Downs in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Bill:

This is a poor document which is misleading and ambiguous. It does not offer certainty to farmers as the Minister and Government have continually promised.

Any subsequent legislation will likely have marked impact on resources such as soil and water, and will therefore not lead to future prosperous development to the State of Queensland, but be unsustainable in the short and long term.

It is our experience and opinion that the resource sector in general has failed miserably to prove they can coexist effectively alongside agriculture. This is particularly the case for open cut mining operations in a heavily settled food bowl district like ours, but has been also been exemplified by the CSG industry and their varied treatment of rural communities and families. The benefits are one sided, and the relationship between mining and farming is best described as parasitic, rather than symbiotic.

We fully endorse Queensland Murray Darling Committee statement that the Government needs to:

- examine closely the mining and resource industry's compliance records;
- analyse social and environmental damage costs;

- identify and assess any gaps in the identification and management of risk arising from mining and resources exploration, assessment, production and rehabilitation, particularly as they relate to human health, the environment, soil and land condition; and water catchments;
- identify best practice in relation to the management of mining developments in close proximity to agricultural enterprises, residential properties and rural townships, and consider appropriate ways to address such interfaces;
- examine how the characteristics of the mining and resources industry in Queensland compare to the industry nationally and internationally;
- examine real costs of regulation to the industry;
- examine profits gained through the exploitation of the State's natural resource assets; and
- make it mandatory for the industry to report on sustainability indicators.

The Acland district is testimony to these points. It is a twelve year case study of mining in a rich agricultural area that the Committee would be well served to examine. There are ground water losses to surrounding properties adjacent to the mine, serious social and health impacts and economic impacts associated with the operation of this mine and forced closure of many family run farms. The downstream economic impacts have caused many business shutdowns in Oakey and district as a consequence. There were more people employed on Acland farms and in local businesses than have replaced with jobs with New Hope Coal. The cash income from 70 Acland farms circulated within the local economy, as opposed to the mining industry where expenditure is large, but benefits only a few. <http://www.tai.org.au/content/biting-land-feeds-you>

Rehabilitation appears to be undertaken as a gesture by resource companies to gain approval for further mine expansion. There are no fully rehabilitated mines in this state and the legacy this leaves to future governments and generations is serious. We hear reports of an estimated \$4 billion unpaid fines due to non-compliance of mining companies, yet this Government continues to encourage and facilitate resource extraction of our best agricultural soils via instruments such as the Darling Downs Regional Plan and now this proposed Bill. There are existing international and national 'leading practice' guidelines for rehabilitation which do not have to be followed.

<http://www.thechronicle.com.au/news/activists-unhappy-with-new-hopes-home-brand-trials/2135250/>

This proposed Bill will afford less protection to the state's best agricultural land than afforded by the current Strategic Cropping Land Act (even though that was less than perfect). It also affords less protection to communities.

The exemption of pre-existing resource activity concerns us as it exempts the entire CSG industry as permits cover most of Queensland. It also concerns us that Mineral Development Leases and Mining leases are exempt. It is unclear how existing coal leases like Acland will be dealt with.

The issue of 'agreement by the landholder' does not take into account when Resource Companies are the landholder (such as Acland, Wandoan and other farming areas). This provision is failing to put the protection of natural resources foremost, and encourages widescale purchase of land by prospective mining companies to overcome restrictions.

The Bill gives the Minister too much power.

The Bill fails to protect other areas of the State rich in biodiversity and of ecological significance. This includes National Parks, nature refuges or reserves, parks and picnic areas, grasslands, woodlands or water resources (other than some used for agricultural purposes).

The inability for third party appeals to occur should be corrected.

In conclusion, it appears to community groups like ours that the resource industry is both the handmaiden and beneficiary of this Bill and its adoption will be to the detriment of future generations of Queenslanders. We hope this Bill is not adopted in this current format but is substantially reviewed and revised.

Yours sincerely

Oakey Coal Action Alliance Inc.