

Shenhua Watermark Coal Project - PAC Hearing – Gunnedah 26 June, 2014.

My name is Amanda Murray and I represent three generations of farming families in this district. As a farm secretary or bookkeeper, I have a thorough understanding of all financial and production figures for many large and medium sized farming enterprises.

We are farmers and graziers who rely heavily on underground aquifers, near Spring Ridge on the Coomoo Coomoo Creek, which is upstream of the Shenhua Watermark Coal project.

I would like to speak today about the unique production of this agricultural area and the conflict of land use.

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) projects that food and feed production will need to increase by 70 percent by 2050 to meet the world's food needs. It is estimated that we will be feeding a global population of nine billion people (two billion more than our current population) by 2050.

In addition to population growth, food needs will rise due to the increasing incomes of people in developing countries as they move from low income into the middle class. As incomes increase, people tend to eat fewer grains and increase their consumption of meat and high value foods.

This transition requires higher levels of resource use. It takes multiple kilos of grain to produce a kilo of meat. As incomes rise, people eat more meat. So the total kilos of grain consumed per person, directly as grain and indirectly through meat, increases substantially.

Producing more human nutrition per hectare is the objective, rather than just more food. This is especially important in countries such as Australia, where our advantages in competitive export markets are often in the quality of the food we produce. From an economic perspective, we should aim to produce high-quality food that will attract the highest price from discerning food consumers both in Australia and in nearby Asian markets.

Australia is poised to become the next food bowl of Asia. We can take advantage of our trusted clean food production with fewer kilometres for the food to travel than any other market.

There is less than 6% arable land in Australia with less than 3% being highly productive agricultural land. Of this 3% there is still great discussion over what constitutes BSAL Land.

The Liverpool Plains supports some of the most efficient and innovative farmers in Australia, if not the world. Our lack of farming subsidies and our dry climate has nurtured

an environment where our farmers are producing more with less resources and this places us in an ideal position to provide Asia and other parts of the World with the high protein diet they will all be consuming by 2050.

What makes this area so unique? Why have I never met a farmer that wouldn't love to farm on the Liverpool Plains? Aside from a very favourable climate, the unique black alluvial soils are extremely fertile, can store large amounts of subsoil moisture and are supported by a vast network of underground aquifers. This water supply allows high animal stocking rates, ample domestic supplies and, of course, irrigation. During the most devastating drought this district is still producing food.

Amongst all this comes the land use conflict where our governments want to allow large international corporations to mine for coal on our best agricultural land. These companies will admit that mining on or near these black alluvial plains with the large system of interconnected underground aquifers has never been attempted before. As comprehensive as the hydrology and water modelling is, no one can categorically guarantee the connectivity of these underground systems.

If there can be no absolute guarantee we cannot risk this prime agricultural land and water for future generations. There is just too much food security at risk.

I don't want to be the grandmother who is asked by her grandchildren – How did your generation let this happen?

References:

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/docs/expert_paper/How_to_Feed_the_World_in_2050.pdf