

PLANNING ASSESSMENT COMMISSION HEARING

Shenhua Watermark Coal Project, Gunnedah LGA 26th June 2014

Submission by: Andrew Pursehouse & Family

Pursehouse Farms Pty Ltd



I am the owner manager of our family farm [REDACTED] I am speaking here today to register my **strong objection** to the proposed Shenhua Watermark Coal Mine at Breeza.

I have lived & worked on this farm for the last 30 years. In that time I have married, produced three great kids, grown the business five times, developed irrigation, & expanded the land area.

We farm 4,400 hectares, have a consistent turn-over of \$6m plus, we employ 6 full time very dedicated staff and use family & casuals as required. This is typical of other farms in our area, we are not hobby farmers.

The major threat to our business is now coal. Our farm is located within the exploration areas of both Shenhua & BHP Billiton. We now share three boundary fences with the Chinese Government. I am glad my father who fought in New Guinea for 5 years is not alive to witness this fact today, particularly when they have been issued with freehold title. Shenhua has purchased prime agricultural land beside us. An underground zone 8 water licence was inherited with this purchase, and so now the ability to buy more. This water will be used to lay dust on roads & wash coal to go to China. This is criminal. This pristine quality water has been used in this community to grow crops.

Our farm operation, like many others in the area, has been very successful, indicated by major recognition awards such as; Australian Cotton Grower 2009, Upper Namoi Cotton Grower of the Year 2009, Gunnedah Farmer of the Year 2006, & the Brownhill Cup winner 2000.

I am an executive member of the Caroon Coal Action Group and a founding member of the Breeza Progress Association. Unfortunately I have been involved in two wars, since becoming manager of our farm business. The first was a water war, and now a war against coal.

Rather than discuss my personal position on this senseless proposal to mine in this area, I would like to give this hearing a brief history of the water war.

The underground water aquifers surrounding the Shenhua project have been utilised for irrigation since the 1960's. Steady growth in the use of the aquifers rang alarm bells to irrigation farmers in the mid 1980's. During that time, unbelievably the Government policy was to mine the resource. The farmers initiated & helped Government to change this policy to a sustainable use policy. The result in the Breeza area, for water zones 3 & 8, a voluntary 35% reduction in groundwater allocation, with **no compensation**.

Many farmers that were using 100% of their original allocation were dealt a cruel blow. However to continue the previous policy would have seen a huge depreciation of their asset in the long term, without taking the pain.

Serious hydrological studies by Departments of Water continued in the 1990's, which indicated the aquifers were not sustainable, even with the 35% reduction. The result, further reductions of water allocation were required. The NSW Government Water Sharing Plans were then developed, leading to zones 3 & 8 suffering badly with 33% & 32% respectively required.

The farmers were dealt an even crueller blow with the introduction of the Water Management Act 2000, allowing unfair compensation for the loss of water entitlements. The policy also gave reductions on an across the board basis. Active licence holders were treated the same as inactive users. The effect on the total community from this loss was inexcusable.

The decision was challenged legally & at huge financial cost to district's farmers. Eventually a State Minister came to the area, saw & recognised the problem & changed the Act. This allowed for common sense & a weighting for history of use, to help relieve the burden on our community.

Today, 9 years later, from all reports the aquifers appear stable. The irrigation farmers have taken a huge financial hit, however the resource is sustainable for future generations. That's the way our farmers view this asset.

I hope the commission will understand we are now under threat again by a new player **COAL**.

It is unacceptable to this community that has already suffered from massive water allocation cuts, to relive the threat of further losses of water & also water quality.

This community has proven in the past it **will fight for justice**.

The farm operations in this area are equal to anything in the world. They are run by highly educated farmers & their staff. We have a high number of young astute new farmers entering the game. We are considered high adopters of technology, & certainly capable of feeding the nation for hundreds of years to come.

Please do not be hood winked by the Shenhua project. Their EIS only covers the top one third of the resource. After this it will be another EIS and then underground to destroy the land & water resources even further. Have a look on the internet under **Google Search** & see Shenhua's handy work in Mongolia.

The question I ask to this Commission & Government is;

"Why put all this to risk for short term dollars, if there is a risk don't go there."

If time permits I would like to discuss the miss treatment by Government in its Environmental Assessment report. Many submissions from farmers raised the concern about dust impacts on crops, particularly cotton & organic grains. This has been handled very poorly.

The Development consent has been given without due consideration of the **potential individual impacts** to farmers in our area. It states from a CSIRO 2006-7 literature review "Australia has the lowest level of contaminants in its cotton". This does not give assurance to Breeza farmers being wiped out by the wrong wind. I can foresee white cotton becoming stained grey if the wrong climatic conditions occur at the wrong time. I give notice today to the State Government to enforce a "make good provision" to protect farmers, if they are silly enough to proceed with mining at Breeza.

PURSEHOUSE FARMS PTY LTD

Farm Details - 2014

Pursehouse Farms Pty Ltd is a family owned & operated farming & grazing business, located at Breeza, on the Liverpool Plains (Breeza Plains) region, in North West N.S.W. Australia. The principals are [REDACTED]

Key staff includes Operations Manager [REDACTED], Head field operator [REDACTED], [REDACTED] Transport Manager/mechanic [REDACTED] & casual staff and family employed as required. [REDACTED] Newcastle [REDACTED]

Agronomic advice is provided by Pursehouse Rural. [REDACTED] operates a 'Premium Ag' intensive agronomic management service, and cotton consultant is [REDACTED] (both based at Pursehouse Rural Gunnedah Branch)

The property aggregation is called [REDACTED] and produces cotton, grain & beef. The historic property was originally settled by the Clift family in the 1830's. The Pursehouse family are only the second owners, purchasing the property from the original owners in 1984. Located next to & west of the Liverpool Ranges (Great Dividing Range) a reliable rainfall average of 650mm p.a occurs evenly throughout winter & summer. Tamworth is 65 km north east, Gunnedah 40km North West & Quirindi 40km south. Sydney is 4 hours drive south.

Winter crops grown include Wheat (bread & durum) Barley, Canola, Fababeans, & Chickpeas.

Summer crops include Cotton, Sorghum, Corn, Sunflowers, and Pigeon Peas.

Cattle consist of 120 Poll Hereford breeders, plus their progeny are fattened on farm. **Land area** owned is 3,352 ha (8,279ac). A neighbouring farm is leased with an area of 1,036 ha. Of the total area 1,040 ha is furrow irrigated, 2,490 ha is dryland farmed, & 858ha is grazed.

Soil type is self mulching black earth, many metres deep. Basalt in origin, & predominately tree less plain country. Some areas of red brown soil exist, with native yellow, white & bumble box trees. Koalas are always prevalent.

Irrigation water is sourced from an underground aquifer, with 6 turbine pumps set 30-70 metres below ground level. The pumps extract between 5 & 14 Mega Litres /day each (50-140,000 gallons per hour each), of beautiful quality water. All tail water & stormwater is collected in water storages (800ML) & recycled. Stock water is obtained 20-25 metres below by windmills & also from the Mooki River.

Dryland farming has been no-tilled continuously since 1992-94. Permanent beds, and controlled traffic lanes, has been used since 1996.

New in 2012 was the introduction of 4 metre spaced tracks (instead of 2m) utilizing 2 John Deere tracked tractors, & 12 metre wide machinery (instead of 8m). Spraying is achieved by a Miller Nitro self-propelled sprayer with a 36 metre wide boom.

Yield mapping of grain production commenced 1998, & Cotton in 2000. This GPS technology has been used intensively to analyse all management of the farm. The philosophy of "If you can't measure it, you cannot manage it" is taken. GPS is also used for surveying & to steer the farms main tractors & sprayer to 2cm RTK accuracy. Laser levelling technology is utilised extensively, on both irrigated land, channels & also on dryland paddocks. The farm has its own laser levelling machinery.

In 2011 a major change occurred with purchase of a new John Deere 7760 Round bale cotton picker and associated handling gear and JCB Loader.