

Address by Hugh Price, Chair Namoi Community Network

**TO PLANNING ASSESSMENT COMMISSION
on
PROPOSED SHENHUA WATERMARK COAL PROJECT,
26 JUNE 2014**

Madam Chair (Ms Kibble), and fellow Commissioners' Mr Payne and Mr Gilligan,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I am Chairman of Namoi Community Network (NCN) which is an affiliated committee of Namoi Water. I am also former Chairman of the CSG Forum Steering Committee that hosted a successful Independent Coal Seam Gas Science and Law Forum at Parliament House in March this year. For 14 years I was Manager of the largest holding on the Liverpool Plains, some 22,000 hectares. I emigrated to this country 35 years ago, because of the attributes of the soils of the Liverpool Plains.

To quote Anthony Roberts; present NSW Minister for Natural Resources and Energy "when considering mining applications.....

.....we need strong science and honest communication....."

I will contend we don't have the first, and are very weak on the second!

And for what purpose?

- To support an increasingly outdated extractive industry for only short term financial gain (30years) and further contribute to increased & unacceptable carbon emissions on the Asian continent, but which will have a permanent and detrimental effect on our own ability meet the future opportunities to contribute to feeding an ever increasingly hungry world from soils unique in this country, and replicated in only a very few other areas of the globe.

Namoi Community Network (NCN) was established by the community in 2011 to ensure the Namoi Catchment Water Study (the Study). commissioned by NSW DTRIS (NSW Dept of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services) in 2010 was completed proficiently and within its Terms of Reference. The Study was to determine the potential effects of coal and CSG resource development activities on catchment water resources of the Namoi Valley.

The NCWS Study was completed and published by the Independent Experts SWS (Schlumberger Water Services) in July 2012, however the final Peer Review of the Study undertaken by GeoScience Australia remains in draft form and, apparently under Federal Ministerial Directive will not be released to the Public.

- **Why is this Review by this highly respected organisation not being published?**
- **What information deduced from the Study is so damaging to prevent the release of the Peer Review?**

I and my Committee continue to strongly oppose this Development. I respectfully refer you to NCN Submission made to the PAC in December 2013.

I wish to make comments on four topics:

Water Resources Impacts

Agricultural Impacts

Social Impacts

Due Process

1. Water Resources Impacts

Salt
The national significance of water to Australia cannot be over stated. The security of water resources and water quality are, and must remain, the prime concerns of this country. It became apparent as the NCWS Study concluded there will be significant irreversible detrimental impacts to the water resources of the Namoi Valley from extractive industries, such as the proposed Shenhua Watermark Project. E.g. broken aquifers, unacceptable water connectivity by intervention, artificial lowering of water tables in soil moisture for dryland farming and irrigation bores. The EIS for this project confirms direct damage will occur to aquifers immediately to the East of the Project. These impacts will significantly reduce the dryland and irrigation production capabilities of the unique soils adjacent to this project area.

As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment, the NSW Dept of Planning & Environment required a 'detailed' assessment of potential impacts on the quality and quantity of existing surface and ground water resources, including, inter alia, 'detailed modelling of potential groundwater impacts'.

- **Was detailed modelling done in accord with the Precautionary Principle?**
- **Has 'sufficient' surface water and groundwater baseline data been obtained, and if so, where is it?**

The Public do not have confidence in the hydrological analysis within Environmental Impact Assessment (EIS). Modelling conducted is considered inadequate and insufficient. With adequate baseline data being generally poor or insufficient, the stratigraphic knowledge for well-informed hydraulic processes is limited. And while legislation such as the aquifer interference guidelines in addressing the key groundwater science may be satisfactory, experience is that monitoring of compliance and implementation of the intended approval requirements will not occur because it is not independently audited.

- **How and where can the public find; robust, trusted independent scientific analysis?**

The greatest issue is that EIS process cannot adequately evaluate cumulative impacts across the groundwater system. Such ongoing evaluation must be conducted by independent

parties and paid for by Shenhua and should form part of the exploration terms, before this Project is allowed to proceed.

2. Agricultural Impacts.

Soils of the Liverpool Plains. The associated and adjacent areas of this proposed mine are one of the most favoured and reliable dryland farming areas of Australia. It has a worldwide renowned reputation for its reliable and highly productive fertile deep soils. These natural attributes are further and dramatically enhanced by high quantities of good quality water available from the underground aquifers by irrigation bores. The vertisol soils have extremely high CEC levels (Cation Exchange Capacity) >60 ~~ppm~~, which, when wetted swell with high water holding capacity and regularly can store >200mms of water in a metre of soil depth. These soil characteristics are dependent on the shallow underground aquifers which ensure the synergies unique to the Liverpool Plains. The latitude of this region then allows a very diverse range of crops to be grown. Such is the natural resource which this Project will jeopardise.

- **Is it worth it?**

3. Social Impacts.

Approval of the Project may have some positive social impacts, in the form of continuing employment in the local community, but there will be significant negative social impacts arising from continuation of adverse impacts of noise and dust, visual impacts, and adverse impacts arising from a change in the composition of the Breeza community. Those impacts must be taken into account in the consideration of all the relevant factors in determining whether the Project should be approved.

The Project's impacts in terms of noise, dust and visual impacts and the adverse change in the composition of the community by the acquisition of noise and air quality affected properties, are likely to cause adverse social impacts on individuals, the Breeza community and the surrounding region. I give you the example of my own daughter and her husband leaving Aberdeen in the Hunter Valley for these same reasons. Impacts from the Shenhua Watermark mine would exacerbate the loss of sense of place, and materially and adversely change the sense of community of the residents of Breeza, and the surrounding countryside. This surely would be contrary to the public interest, and have a significant undesirable social impact.

4. Due Process

The assessment and approval 'playing field' heavily favours big business and big government, to the disadvantage of the general public.

The assessment system needs to acknowledge the disadvantages imposed on the general public, namely:

- **limited knowledge** of many of the complex technical issues compared to the knowledge of the company and government;
- **limited time** to make learned contributions/submissions compared to the company and government;
- **limited financial resources** compared to the company and government;
- **limited legal resources** compared to the company and government;
- **limited political influence** compared to the company and government;

The PAC needs to bring greater transparent equality to the existing system that would allow the public to fully engage, be heard and for the decision making process to be seen to be transparent and evidenced-based with discretion eliminated from the decision making framework.

It is very difficult to believe this exists with this project, when already Shenhua have paid the NSW Government a reputed \$400,000,000.

Role of the PAC: the public anxiously seeks a body it can trust on decisions regarding major developments. Someone they believe will give them; the small players, a fair go. The public would love it to be you; just a much stronger, better resourced and more independent you!

The community demands that someone in authority will give just as much weight to their case as to that of the company or government. At the moment the perception is, considering the Government processes overall, there is a bias in favour of the developer. The community wants more transparency and greater accountability, and a Dept of Planning & Environment that shows itself an even handed planning agency, not as an advocate for the proponent.

This completes my address.

Thank you.