

Good morning members of the PAC, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Katrina McDonald. I have lived and worked in this area for 20 years and have strong local knowledge which is supported by my professional skills, experience and qualifications. I have an Honours Degree in Rural Science, a Post Graduate Diploma in Agricultural Economics, a Post Graduate Certificate in Sustainable Agriculture and a MBA. I am currently enrolled in a PhD. Today I speak to you as a community member.

My professional roles have all been in natural resource management and primary production. I have been a community rep for a number of committees, including the Stakeholder Advisory Group for the Namoi Catchment Water Study and two Shenhua Community Reference Groups. At all times my goal has been to ensure that the best information possible is used to make development decisions. I am a strong supporter of the precautionary principle and the principle of Intergenerational Equity. When our climate has warmed beyond belief, what will our grandchildren say when they know that we had the chance to prevent yet another coal mine which will contribute nearly one billion tonnes of greenhouse emissions?

The Minister for Resources and Energy said last week that “resource development must be done in a sustainable manner and take account of all other land users and their interests. As such I want to make it clear that this government will protect our water resources and will not allow resource development to have a detrimental effect on water systems.”

This being the case, I am not sure why we are here, as the Shenhua Watermark project can clearly not go ahead. Regarding the potential for negative impacts, it is hard to know

where to start and where to finish. I have considered comments from the Gateway Panel, statements from the independent review of the EIS by Earth Systems, and advice from the Independent Expert Scientific Committee. The use of statements such as “limited confidence,” “insufficient information,” “this statement is false,” “this is misleading” and “insufficient evidence” by independent experts in reference to the EIS and RTS rings alarm bells to me, as I expect it will to you. The independent experts have concerns with the methodology, assumptions, sensitivity analysis, modelling data and risk assessment in the EIS. Further, in many instances the significant data gaps result in the experts being unable to comment on potential impacts. Clearly, this project cannot go ahead.

I will make some specific comments on the EIS. The water that collects in the final void will be salty, and will impact surrounding aquifers and surface water, leading to irreversible salinity of water and soils on agricultural land, on-site, and downstream. Regional water balances were not provided. The on-site water balance was based on long term average rainfall. No consideration of climate variability has been taken into account, yet the impact of high intensity storms which are predicted with climate change will be extremely high runoff and huge amounts of soil erosion, leading to even worse water quality issues than currently predicted, and pit flooding.

Regarding groundwater impacts, I quote the Independent Expert Scientific Committee: “Insufficient justification and verification has been provided with regard to the nature of faulting and interconnectivity.” The Namoi Catchment Water Study predicted aquifer drawdowns of at least 2 meters. At least 2 meters! We don’t know what the maximum would be. In any case, we know that any drawdown cannot be tolerated. In keeping with the Minister’s words, this mine cannot be approved.

I have a number of other areas of major concern. These include the Critically Endangered Ecological Communities. The White Box, Yellow Box, Inland Grey Box, Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodlands, Weeping Myall Woodland, Fuzzy Box Woodland, Brigalow and Derived Native Grassland. Then there are the very rare Poplar Box and Belah Woodlands. Yes the list is long. Irrespective of what the law says, offsets and rehabilitation can never replace an endangered ecological community. The macro and micro environment can never be the same. To be classified as a critically endangered ecological community, at least 12 non-grassy species must be present. And then there are the myriad of species that we either don't notice, or don't see – the insects, spiders and microbes. How can nature be emulated? It can't. These critically endangered communities are also the home of 9 threatened bird species, 1 threatened bat species, and a highly active koala population, which is supposedly going to be subjected to a "Koala Translocation Management Plan." I can think of other things I would like to translocate, and it is not the koalas. For so many reasons, this mine cannot go ahead.
Thank you

Katrina Dickson (McDonald)