

PLANNING ASSESSMENT COMMISSION HEARING

Watermark Coal Project

27 June, 2014

My name is Megan Kuhn, I am fifth generation farmer and I live with my husband and son on the south western fringe of the Liverpool Plains.

Firstly and most importantly, I am a mother of a very special son, who has special needs but has taught me more in life than any other. I am here to represent him and his future. He has taught me courage in the face of adversity and to stand up for what is right!

Through caring for him and his physiological needs, it has heightened my awareness as to the risks this open cut coal mine development imposes on the families of our region.

So, to honour him and my own conscience I have stepped way outside my comfort zone, as many people here today have also done.

As this threat to our livelihoods grows, I became an active member of the Save Our Soils Liverpool Plains, a wonderful group of dedicated women working to support our community. And we are members of the North West Alliance. I have pursued my interest in working with communities and have taken on the role as the regional co-ordinator for Lock the Gate.

Working with communities at a grass roots level is a position that I feel extremely privileged to hold. The passion this issue has stirred across our region is extremely evident and I commend you brave people as you come off your farms and away from your business again today to stand together.

I am blessed to be where people care for each other and the land and life they support. The fabric of our society is a complex network which entwines and enriches our lives as we rely on each other. I am so blessed to work with united communities who know that their true values have high moral and social power that we are united against this invasive industry and together we clearly reject it.

We have a sense of connectedness to each other and the land we live on and it is through that connectedness that we've shown we have a **priceless wealth of community**.

In stark contrast, miners have offices overseas and in capital cities and clearly know nothing of the values our community hold dear. They have huge budgets for add campaigns, lobbyists that give them access to decision makers and it is obvious they have a huge influence which has distorted our democracy.

It is plainly clear that they will never have what we have as they care nothing for the true wealth of the bush.

They might have mining capital – we have social capital.

They lack a sense of place. To them, these rich productive alluvial Liverpool Plains and surrounding landscapes, the essential waterways and underground aquifers, is what they just drill and blast through and all they see is “mine, mine, mine”.

But for us, it is our life blood. All these places are important to us and our ability to survive in the outback, to support our families and to grow clean healthy food for all Australians.

They lack a connection to the land and any appreciation of weather cycles and patterns, ignoring the seasons that we know supports life.

We on the other hand know how tough Mother Nature can be and we have a deep respect for how precious water is to grow crops, to keep animals as livestock not ‘dead stock’; and of course keep our communities thriving.

We know we are all connected by water and by the air we breathe because we live it daily.

The truth is we are here today because the legal system and all levels Government have failed us. Our lives have been confronted by a massively steep learning curve where sleepless nights, endless meetings, constant and relentless concern add extreme pressure to our everyday lives.

They have good reason to be concerned. These beautiful people have, for years, been expressing their rejection of this invasion through letters, emails, petitions, advertisements, signs, actions, meetings, lobbying, rallies and protesting. In fact the Caroon Blockade was the longest running blockade ever held demonstrating such strength and determination to stand together lasting 623 days.

So, it appears we are here again at another tick the box exercise to simply have this Chinese owned coal project steam roll over our community – who are the very fabric of society needed to keep rural towns alive.

This is just wrong and I am not the only person here today feeling that way.

You see, the privileged position I’m in is one that neither you nor the company will ever be in. I have worked with these communities across the Liverpool Plains at a grass roots level and I have a true insight to the reasons why they have taken this stand.

We have gone from community to community and undertaken a neighbour to neighbour survey, run by the people for the people. We simply and genuinely asked them what their wishes are. This is democracy in action and the results are clear.

Of the 700,000 ha surveyed so far on the Liverpool Plains, 96% of all community members have declared their homes, roads, communities free of industrialisation. That's right – 96% reject the company's and government's plans to vandalise this irreplaceable food bowl.

It is abundantly clear they have no social licence or community acceptance.

We have proved we have common sense for a common good.

We know we're the majority. We're just ordinary people, defending what we love. We're not politically aligned. We're nurses, farmers, tradesmen, teachers, accountants, lawyers, mums and dad's. We think this project is reckless and extreme.

We have genuine and valid concerns and we are united with a resolve to protect our region. The community clearly reject Shenhua's Watermark Open Cut Coal Project proposal.

If Australia is truly a democracy, the people have spoken and the answer is clear. The 'duty of care' is now in your hands to 'protect' these people.