

Madam Chair and Panel

Welcome to Gunnedah

GUNNERAH TROBE,

My Name is Don Ewing, I have lived in Gunnedah all my life as did my father and my grandfather. My great grandfather John Peter Ewing came to Gunnedah in 1884 as the first sergeant of police. One of his sons, my great uncle Stanley witnessed the exhumation of the bones of the great chief of the Cumbo Gunnerah. It was from Stanley Ewing's recounting of this and other incidents in his diaries that was the basis of Ian Idresse's novel The Red Chief. I am a third generation real estate agent and auctioneer. My daughter is the fourth generation in our family business.

I am speaking in support of the mining industry, and the Shenhua Watermark Project and the importance of it to our economy.

Mining has been in existence in this district since 1877, ironically even between Curlewis and Breeza ,with some existing remnants of those operations still visible on the proposed Shenhua site.

A lot has happened since 1877.

Whilst travelling into Gunnedah you must have noticed the development on the outskirts of our beautiful town, the modern housing, the vibrant shopping centre, the infrastructure development to support our North West rail line, a modern health centre, expanding residential subdivisions complete with a superb mixture of designs and lifestyles, the new Aldi Supermarket, the great choice of cafes and restaurants .You will notice the busy traffic at every intersection from 5am in the morning till after 10 in the evening and the motels with no vacancies.

Madame Chair this was not always so.

Our town's economy has been boosted enormously over the last twenty years and without being too provocative , it has been created by the increased development of coal explorations and development.

This industry has created over 1500 jobs since 2005. Only a decade before our town was on its knees. Gunnedah and District had received multiple blows to its economy.

- In 1994-96 our community endured a two year drought. During this time some farmers bought cotton hull to feed their starving cattle. It was later found that the feed they had used was contaminated by the chemical Helix rendering their stock unsalable and resulting in their farms being quarantined.
- Mad Cow disease in Europe affected our export of beef from Australia to Japan and elsewhere causing a drop of almost 20% of our export market. This contributed to the closure of our famous abattoirs and Korean meat processing company . 500 jobs were gone from this town
- the Asian economy collapsed bringing the closure of 3 coal mines. 750 workers were lost to the community. This loss was compounded by the loss of subsidiary industries that serviced the mining companies.

It would be fair to assume that our beautiful town of at this time around 9000 people suffered a total loss over over 1200 jobs . Madam Chair we were on our knees.

Real estate values plummeted over 30%. The loss of jobs and income to our community was horrendous. It drained our community of residents .. we had over 500 homes for sale. No one was buying, everyone was just trying to cut their losses and sell.

What turned this around ?

The worlds' appetite to provide infrastructure for their expanding populations. The need to manufacture steel from iron ore and our coal to fire the furnaces.

In 2005 we started to see interest in our coal by the big players, -- expansions by Whitehaven, Boggabri Coal and with proposed developments by BHP Billiton and Shenhua Watermark. These mines accumulatively have contributed more to the progression of Gunnedah than any government of either persuasion have done in a century

It is my opinion that Shenhua have established a benchmark in excellent community involvement by a coal company.

They have built their own office complex in our main street and have committed 5 million dollars to much needed community projects.

When you walk into our hospital you will see upgraded maternity and children wards and lounge areas as well as TV's in every ward. Take a leisurely walk along the new walkways alongside the Namoi River. A new rest area now exists for travellers on the Mullaley road. All these projects have been built by Service Clubs such as PRAMS, Rotary and Lions with funds provided by Shenhua.

Instead of battling with farm owners for third party access, Shenhua purchased property in their exploration area, paying owners well over value. Many of these farmers than in turn re-bought in our area . Many farmers also bought investment properties in town.

Shenhua workers have integrated into the community joining many of the local sporting and service clubs

Shenhua have invited our citizens to participate in events of cultural significance to them. I for one was privileged to be invited to participate in their Chinese Moon Festival celebrations.

Due to the involvement of Shenhua , other mining consulting companies have been encouraged to set up businesses in this town.

All of this means that Gunnedah is a thriving country town. Our population has expanded to 12,000 and is attracting young people to live and start to grow their families.

Gunnedah has a future.