

Planning Assessment Commission Meeting

Watermark Coal Project SSD4975, Gunnedah

Date & Time: Commencing 2 pm, Wednesday 10 December 2014

Place: Gunnedah Services and Bowling Club, [REDACTED]

Presenter: Nigel Herring – Chief Executive Officer AMPS Agribusiness Ltd

Notes:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Commission. My name is Nigel Herring. I am CEO of a local business called AMPS Agribusiness. Our main business hub is located 9km south of the Watermark site.

As a potentially impacted business, I would like to address the issue of farming sustainability and the impact on our business and the wider ag community.

My focus in this presentation is about Risk. Like all of you, we continually deal with risk in our businesses. The Commission has this responsibility in assessing the Watermark project.

Like most of you here today, I see the Liverpool plains as a truly unique agricultural region in Australia. Not only does it have a unique combination of soils, water and climate – which is well documented. It also has a unique farming community with a passion for sustainability, education and community good will.

One example of this is the founding of our own company.

Ours is a local business. It was founded in 1998 by 23 local farming families who had a passion for ensuring sustainability and a willingness to control their own destiny.

They could see investment in Agricultural research being cut by state departments, and decided that the best way to respond was to do it themselves.

They formed a company AMPS – which if profitable would fund Production Research, invest in rural communities and build closer ties to end use markets.

From humble beginnings, our business has evolved into mid sized Ag Merchandise/Crop Inputs business with two grain handling facilities and now a major investor in production research. We employ 30 staff across our business. We now have 60 farmer shareholders and countless customers who engage with our unique commercial/research relationship.

Our customers know that the profits of the business will be invested back into their local community. That is why they support us. It is a local focus, building careers for local people – giving children opportunities in Agriculture outside pure farming.

We have invested heavily in Production Research. Our research is scientifically valid, and looks to solve local issues for local farmers. Ultimately we look to build robust but sustainable farming systems that support local communities.

Our research is envied by Farming systems groups throughout Australia. We host countless farming groups, all keen to glean knowledge, share ideas but ultimately all wonder at the Agricultural resources of the Liverpool plains. The Liverpool Plains farming community is a leader in its own right. The wider Ag community looks to this region to lead, and sometimes “take the risks” on potential genetic and farming systems advancements and the like.

These resources should not be risked. The farming operations that surround the mining operations have the uncertainty of ground water, surface water, air quality and operational impacts. There are many more qualified to comment on this. It is the intangibles or flow on effects on the community and specifically our business that I am obliged to reconcile.

What will happen to our leading farming businesses and the impact on our profitability and therefore ability to contribute funds back into research, value add, local community etc?

What will happen to our staff mix, ability to retain?

What will happen to the sense of community that this region enjoys and benefits from?

Its one thing to risk the resources – which on face value maybe measurable and maybe controllable?

Its is quite another to risk resources *and* businesses, *and* sense of community that the Agricultural sector has developed in the local region through generations of sustainable farming.

As a concerned business operator I would challenge the Commission to consider the intangibles and the Risks in its deliberations.

Thank you.