

Planning Assessment Commission Hearing
Watermark Coal Project, Gunnedah LGA

Submission: Brian Pepper



I am a landholder in Breeza, have lived and worked here for 10 years, and I'm speaking to register my strong objection to the proposed Shenhua Watermark Coal Mine at Breeza. I spoke earlier this year at the commission hearing held here in Gunnedah when I registered my concern about the effect of the Watermark Coal Project on water quality, living standards and the impact on our local economy through destruction of the agricultural industry.

I previously spoke about the high risk of contamination and loss of ground water being of significant concern. The recent dry weather and drought has only highlighted how important water security is. Shenhua has not guaranteed that our water table won't be contaminated. By guarantee I mean no doubt, no risk at all, that they have plan which ensures contamination or loss of the water table is impossible. The Planning Commission has recommended the management of these risks to "not go beyond the bounds of reason." The Planning Assessment Commission has made recommendations using language that allows for the requirements to be managed by Shenhua, and the lack of measurable goals is of great concern. How can we trust that the company will do what's best for the local community and not just their own interests. This is unacceptable. You cannot allow a company with an environmental history such as that held by Shenhua to be left to their own devices in managing risk to local agricultural interests. All the information that I have had access to indicates that this mining project has only just met the bare minimum requirements. There appears to have been no attempt to ensure that this mine will not only just meet requirements but to exceed them. A prime example is that this project only has to build dams that will withstand a 1 in 100yr flood level, this is not a high standard as a housing development in NSW only has to meet the same mitigation requirements. A

high standard would be at least a 1 in 250yr flood event mitigation and preferably a 1 in 500yr flood event. I attended a meeting hosted by Shehua at the Breeza hall in March 2009 at which they stated this mine would have the highest standards of any mine in Australia. They appear to have forgotten this promise and have fallen severely short.

I also spoke about our community's reliance on ground water not only for agricultural purposes, but also for drinking water. What is Gunnedah Council's or Shenhua's contingency plan for the town water supply when this mine contaminates the upstream water? The risks that this mine pose are just too great to be deemed acceptable or even manageable.

My concerns about the level of noise and dust generated by this mining operation have not changed. The negative impacts on my quality of living are unacceptable. I want to reiterate the financial burden this mine will place upon me and my family. I don't want compensation, no amount of money can make up for the loss of my living standards. I want to raise a family here but can't see how I can provide the best for them if this mine goes ahead.

This mine is not a necessary production. There is a current world over-supply of coal. The coal that will be produced by this mine is not even good quality. The earning potential of this mine is questionable. Mines have been closing down or ceasing production because there is just too much coal being produced. As a result of this, coal prices are plummeting. The argument that this mine will benefit our economy is therefore flawed. How can a mine, that is going to be producing a commodity that is in oversupply, be profitable enough to not only boost the local and state economy but also pick up the financial burden left when the local agricultural industry is devastated. We need to look at the long term benefits for our community. The agricultural industry in our area alone is worth \$280 million a year and has been consistently producing and maintaining our local economy for decades. A mine, running at a loss may provide short-term employment but won't provide any significant money for the state coffers as there will be no company taxes paid on a

loss. So there is no benefit to our state economy and no long-term benefit to our local economy. If the agricultural industry is looked after it will continue to be the foundation of our local community for the foreseeable future. A coal mine has a finite production limit. Once all the coal is gone they move on and leave our land bereft and the other local industries broken. Who will be here to pick up the pieces and mend the damage done? Some of the damage will be irreversible and we will never recover.

Perhaps people think this mine will improve employment in our region. Well, the recent free-trade agreement signed with China means they can employ Chinese nationals to work their mines. So I wouldn't count on improved employment.

If we ignore the social impacts of this mine. If we ignore the fact that it will destroy family livelihoods, devastate communities and ruin our environment and just look at the bottom line, it just doesn't make sense. Our agricultural industry may not be worth billions in the same time frame as the mine, but it is worth more in the long-term. Once the mine is finished or closed down because it proved unprofitable what will be left?