

Introduction – ladies and gentlemen my name is Barry Thomson Real Estate agent who has lived in the community for the past 65 years having been a property owner at Maules Creek prior to entering the real estate industry. I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

I take an active role in the community. I am the current President of the Boggabri Pony Club, President of Maules Creek Hall committee prior to moving to Boggabri and past President of the local Clay Target Club. President Boggabri Campdraft Committee and active in rural fire service for 28 years at Maules Creek.

The coal mines in this area are not all bad news; I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the mining industry:

90% of my sales with lifestyle blocks and houses are related to coal mine workers (**not large rural properties**)

They purchase lifestyle blocks for their families some for a second home for an investment to have rentals.

Boggabri main Street between 5:30 and 6:30 pm you cannot get a park as mine workers are getting take away refreshments or going to the hotel, hotel packed each afternoon with fluoro shirts.

The food outlets: The Grab & Go, Bluebird and service station each morning around 5am is like Pitt Street with the mine workers purchasing lunches etc.

Vault accommodation seems to be booked regularly by coal miner employees.

Our local plumber employs 15 staff due to mines, our local garage huge amount of work from mine workers.

The Boggabri Lions Club BBQ for mine workers weekly, stated by Geoff Eather around \$40,000 per year to go back to the community – all from coal mines - meat being purchased from the local butcher.

The drought has had a dramatic effect on our area over the past 2-3 years, with farm employment being in short demand. With thanks to local coal mines our young people have been able to stay in our area securing jobs, if this wasn't available they would have moved to the city to secure jobs and gone from the area forever.

The Vickery extension will create more jobs for local employment; hoping locals will fill these positions. The mine is on a gravel hill – very ordinary country, great place for it like the Maules Creek mine. Whitehaven need to comply and follow all conditions handed down by all Departments in relation to guidelines for the Vickery extension and stay away from the Namoi River.

An article in the Land newspaper last week made comment

“Where has all the water gone?”

I owned farms and lived in Maules Creek for over 50 years and when the creeks ran wells and bores that fed from Maules Creek filled up, when the creeks dried most wells and bores dried up a few months later or dropped to very low levels.

The picture of Elfin Crossing in the Land Newspaper - this crossing around 2002 was completely dry and there were no coal mines in the Maules Creek area then, our farm being on the banks of this creek at Elfin with only a few local irrigators including myself at the time.

I feel if the community and the coal mines could work together for the better of our community we could all benefit.

In finishing I do feel Whitehaven can do more for our community of Boggabri. I feel they will do so in the future.

If the drought continues next year we may all be looking for employment at the mines including myself.

Benny Thomson