

GEORGE AWARD

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Chairman, members of the IPC, Ladies & Gentlemen.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the commission in regards to the Vickery Extension Project or more particularly the benefits that I see that Whitehaven Coal has brought to the Gunnedah Community.

My name is George Award, I am 70 years old & have been a resident all my life, having a farming & business background & until this day run a steel fattening enterprise.

I initially prepared my speech in support of Whitehaven's Vickery Project in reference to my position as past president of the Gunnedah Show Society of which I am a life member & the experience gained through selling rural properties for 25 years.

During my tenure as President of the Show Society it was evident that unless we could attract a major sponsor the longevity of the Show was in doubt, such was the financial situation.

I approached the then CEO of Whitehaven Mr Tony Haggerty who did not hesitate & to this day Whitehaven have been the prime sponsor of an iconic event that has been going for 128 years & we have an amicable working partnership.

Further to this Gunnedah Show Society was forced into a position whereby they had to demonstrate we could hold major events at the grounds in order to attract some identified \$4 million of infrastructure that didn't comply with safety.

The Society came up with the FIMEX Concept (Innovation Energy & Mining Expo) which was held in November with about 60 major exhibitors. Whitehaven, thru Mr Paul Flynn & Jamie Fradcombe put their hand up to be the major sponsor & exhibitor. It will now become a bi-annual event.

The inaugural event attracted 3,000 visitors and in preparation we identified 85 businesses associated with the mining industry and raised \$15,000 for local charities.

This culminated in the Society receiving \$1.8 million of government funds which I believe EIMEX contributed to.

To many this may be perceived as a conflict of interest having received ongoing sponsorship deals from Whitehaven, but to the contrary it demonstrates their commitment to the Yarnedah District & I believe part of their mantra as a Good Corporate Citizen.

It is also interesting to note that ^{none} very few of the major agricultural properties or associated industries would entertain sponsorship of this magnitude, surprising as we are basically an agricultural show.

As mentioned earlier, the speech I had prepared has been drastically altered after attending the Boggabri forum. I was disappointed to say the least that phrases like "environmental vandals" and not having "a social conscience" was loosely bandied around by some of the speakers.

Firstly let me say that in my position as a rural estate salesman (specialising in rural properties) I witnessed many atrocities committed by the rural sector over the 80's and early 90's in particular.

In particular tailwater being tipped directly into regulated streams, pumping aquifers until they were not sustainable (till boxes in villages went dry), indiscriminate chemical spraying & ad-hoc development of banks & storages across the many floodplains.

The catalyst that brought this to a halt was the issue with ~~HE~~ HELIX & ENOBOLPHON which affected many cattle producers including myself.

Thankfully this has stopped with the implementation of the Water Planning Plans, strict regulation of earth works and the banning of certain chemicals.

Conversely during this time I witnessed discrepancies with mining companies as I owned a property in an EL designated area. This included dubious rehabilitation practices safety & noise issues not related to Whitehaven but Bloomfield and Centennial Coal.

As previous speakers have said I have vivid memories when the coal mines & abattoirs closed. It was devastating for the town with thirty five vacant shops a depressed real estate market and the masses of all our young people were leaving to seek employment in other centres.

Our population dropped to 7,500 and there didn't seem any hope for recovery. I headed a venture capital group which tried to get an agricultural college located here but to no avail.

Unfortunately as the years progressed farms were amalgamating, gear was getting bigger, ~~the~~ with the advent of round-belt pecky cotton there was no cotton picking and contract farming became the norm. Hence the employment in agriculture was diminishing.

The mines were a salvation in 2005 for along came jobs, business & resultant confidence.

Confidence to build new homes subdivisions were created and today we have a prosperous town with magnificent facilities.

This can be drastically complemented by the breaking of the drought & farmers once again thriving in such a usually safe rainfall area.

An area and town which is the envy of many inland towns who are envious of beautiful quality resource we are blessed with and the resultant prosperity.

Today, like the farming fraternity, mining companies are strictly policed, by not only government bodies, monitoring systems, but activists groups, neighbours and the wider community who would not hesitate to "do them in".

The issue with water extraction was constantly addressed by speakers and although an expert I understand the obligations of the Water Sharing Plans and such licences. In order for Whitehaven to extract some 2,000 mgl of ground water & surface water they would be required to have the relevant licences. Also to put this in perspective it is the equivalent of what a 300 hectare cotton farm would use. I must mention the foresight of Yurrudah Council in not allowing FIFO camps in the basin for it has brought certainty & optimism back into the market.

One of ~~the~~ my concerns are for those few genuine farmers, namely the Barlows, Watts, McEwen & Darleys who get caught up in scenarios like this. To flippanantly say as Mr Warnock Giblin stated that they are collateral damage is no consolation, but I have confidence that, although it may not be their preferred outcome, a realistic solution must be obtained for them to move forward.

In conclusion may I offer ^{qualified} support for the project and hope that the scientific evidence provided satisfies the critics, for without science we have no barometer to gauge projects of this sensitivity.

Yurrudah Basin having the highest quality coal and mined by what I believe is a good corporate citizen should ensure that "best practices" will apply & that the project will be done right.