

Good afternoon Chairman and panel.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, in favour of the Whitehaven Vickery Expansion.

I am proudly a farmer and landholder at Boggabri. We moved to this district in 1988 – 30 years ago. I was raised on the land in the Manilla area, as were the previous three generations of my family. I enjoy farming, and couldn't imagine myself doing anything else. We have raised and educated our three children here in Boggabri and Gunnedah and I have always endeavoured to buy local whenever I can. I support my local town and community. My wife and I are in Boggabri Lions, I am a member of the Boggabri RSL Club, Boggabri Tractor Shed, member of the Wean Race Committee, I am on the Drovers Camp Fire Committee and I am Vice Captain of the Nandewar Bushfire Brigade.

We have lived within 6klm of mining for the last 18 years, and before that the Vickery mine when it was operating back in the 90s.

I have two employees and my son Ambrose, who has done a degree in business, and has now come back to the farm.

I also lease land from Whitehaven Coal, as do several farmers in my area. I do have lease land adjacent to Vickery Project. Whitehaven have been proactive in granting longer leases to ensure security for leasees and has adopted a long-term approach to ensure each leasee uses best practice to manage the land so it is not only productive but sustainable in the future.

Whitehaven has endeavoured to evaluate the farming practices on the leased farms, by an audit-ing panel consisting of 2 agronomists, a financial expert, a Whitehaven representative and a stock and station agent. These audits identify any problems arising on the leased farm and assist in resolving any concerns.

70% of these farms are out-dated. Invasive box thorns and gal burr need controlling. Stock yards, water infrastructure and fencing need ongoing maintenance. Whitehaven are working together with the farmers on the lease land, to address all these matters. We have bio-security plans in place and aim to have paddocks well fenced and watered for new stock arrivals for a 24 hour lock-up.

It is a positive time in the Nandewar farming district, because Whitehaven are encouraging existing farming families, who have sons and daughters, to stay on the land. Thus keeping the bus runs active and helping small towns grow.

Looking back, from 1991 to 1995 district farmers faced adverse dry conditions. Our agriculture industry was challenged with the crash of the wool floor price and widespread bans on cattle exports due to the contamination from the Helix in the cotton trash which was introduced as supplementary drought fodder. During those difficult years, the presence of mining in the district helped carry the local economy and kept our towns alive.

Then, in 1995-1996, we witnessed the closure of the Gunnedah Colliery which had operated for 100 years. Likewise, around this time, the Vickery Mine then owned by Rio Tinto, also ceased operations. Both were big employers in the local area.

As a result, people did leave the district. I began to notice many commercial buildings and retail shops falling vacant. I have recently spoken to locals about those years, most recall it was a tough time to be in business.

It was in 1999-2000 that Keith Ross established Whitehaven Coal Mining. It was a small group of men – taking a chance, rolling the dice, with a high risk of failure. I recall the local paper often running headline articles following the planning and approval process – full of hope for the future. Breathing life back into Gunnedah and Boggabri. Especially with the closure of the abattoir in 1997 which was a big loss to the town.

The success and growth of Whitehaven Mining has created a footprint on the Maules Creek, Wean & Nandewar district. Farmers can feel threatened from mining, which is understandable. It is an issue that needs to be resolved but is achievable. In my opinion, based on my own experience, I believe that farming and mining can work together.

I consider that Whitehaven, as a company, is similar to an Agriculture or Super Fund company, in that they have to be always looking to the long-term future.

My understanding is that the resources at Rocglen Mine and Sunnyside Mine only have approximately an 18-month life remaining. Werris Creek Mine has about 7 years remaining and Tarrawonga Mine is already half way through. So I understand the need for Vickery Mine to beef up and perform.

Regarding water, I have had personal experience growing up on an irrigation property on the Peel River in the 60's and 70's. We grew about 14,000 square hay bales per year. We irrigated from wells 5ft round and 18ft deep that did 30,000 gallons per hour. Dad went from diesel to electric. When the power poles were being put in, they kept hitting water at 5ft on the Lucerne flats.

My sister and I always went fishing when we could, catching yellow belly and catfish. The water was clear and beautiful to swim in. Chaffey Dam was completed in 1979, and four years later we found ourselves digging our wells deeper to 23ft, where we hit bedrock. The well water was draining back to the river.

We abandoned our wells and went back to our river licence. We then learned that once Chaffey got back to 50% we could only use 50% of our licence. The river literally died. The river stopped flowing and the water was no longer clear. In 1986 we had to fence off the whole river, so stock didn't walk across to the neighbours.

In 1984 we purchased a farm at Goodooga. We weren't there long when we attended a meeting at the Goodooga pub regarding stock and domestic water flows. Cubby Station, in QLD, had built water storage to grow cotton which was affecting the river system. It affected 3 main rivers. The Culgoa, the Bokhara and the Narran – they all flowed into NSW.

The Narran River, which was known in the 70's as one of the best fishing rivers out west – simply died. There was little water getting thru, and any water that did come down was directed to the Bokhara River because the town of Goodooga depended on it. Farmers along the Narran River then had to build their own water storages to be able to pump when the Narran flowed, for stock water.

So, in my lifetime, I have personally witnessed the extreme change in two river systems. The demise of these rivers had nothing at all to do with mining. Dams are necessary, but in my opinion, they do come at a cost – sacrificing the beauty of our rivers and turning them into pipelines. River management has been an ongoing problem for many decades and we now find ourselves in a situation with Lake Keepit drying up and 100's of fish that could be 50 years old left to die.

None of us should be pointing the finger at each other, we should work together and have a plan in place when dam levels get down to 20% and act for the sake of our dams and rivers.

In closure, I again say that farming and mining can work together. I know many farmers who work in the mining industry both full time or part time, especially through a drought year like this one. They are using mining as a tool to create a cash flow and keep the dream alive, keeping the family farm growing and expanding so they can work side by side with their sons and daughters going forward.

Thank you.