

## IPC Hearing – Vickery Extension

Boggabri RSL 4<sup>th</sup> February 2019

I would like to acknowledge the Gomeroi traditional owners of the land, and pay my respects to their elders past and present, who have endured many difficult consultations and denials to enter their country to perform ceremony prior to destruction of many of their significant and sacred sites in and around the Leard State Forest, at the hands of Whitehaven Maules Creek Coal company which is part of the same company that now seeks approval for an extension at the Vickery Coal mine near Boggabri.

I am a local resident that has serious concerns regarding many social, mental, emotional, cultural and environmental issues that will affect the immediate surrounding residents, and the township of Boggabri if this Vickery extension is approved. The cumulative effects of dust, noise and light already impacts this district surrounding the open-cut complex that operates in the Leard State Forest, another large open-cut mine extension ramping up to 10 million tons per annum, and a new bore field will certainly have an even greater impact on our most precious element, Water!

Lack of consultation, refusal to answer questions at CCC meeting by Whitehaven Coal all leave the community in the dark. This company needs to be much more transparent and respectful of the local community if they are to operate and get approval for the Vickery extension.

As a community representative at both Boggabri Coal and Maules Creek Coal, a recorded transcript would go a long way to providing an accurate record of all discussions and provide the wider community with an accurate understanding of what transpires in these meetings. I would suggest that recording of CCC meetings be implemented for all of Whitehaven Coal CCC's. It is unfortunate, that this company has a long history of not answering questions that are put to them at these triple C meetings, or answering the questions posed to them by the community representatives long after the changes to Management Plans or other important information should have been provided to the community. These meetings are at best our only real opportunity to communicate with this company and gain understanding of how they are operating in our back yard.

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The most difficult part of living and surviving in the local vicinity of a large open cut coal mine such as this proposed Vickery Extension, is the impacts that it will have on the local community, and that the responsibility of burden of proof always rests on the locals to prove to the authorities, the impacts that have affected their lives and the environment e.g. loss of ground water, decline in health, impacts on native vegetation and livestock and native fauna, has been inflicted by the mining companies. This burden of proof should be the responsibility of the mining company to prove that they have done no harm. Self-reporting and communication to the Department simply stating that they have met all their conditions of consent in their annual reviews are unreliable. Meeting consent conditions doesn't always mean no harm has been done to the environment or people.

construction and blasting was carried out for the rail line, my residence is approximately 7kms from that blast site. The over-blast pressure shook my house, one of the many experiences that continued while much of the infrastructure construction was being built, and as blasting continues during operational mining.

Any buildings near by can expect such events, and it is a concern that the Dorethea Mackellar house and out buildings may be irreparably damaged by the construction and mining blasting.

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Blasting will ultimately produce dust that cannot be suppressed by watering so the residents will be showered by the fallout from lots of coal dust that will settle on everything including their house roofs, rainwater tanks, gardens, outdoor furniture, crops and pastures. My experience was of dead geraniums that just could not survive from layers of dust settling on their leaves after fallout from blasting which was not washed off due to the long dry periods without rain, most gardeners would know its hard to kill geraniums even with neglect.

### **Offsets and Rehabilitation.**

The Willeroi Offset, forms part of the Vickery Approval and although tree planting has been underway, only time will tell if this is successful during this season of prolonged drought. There is extensive erosion in places on this offset, captured in aerial photographs, so this offset could not be considered, to be 'like for like' as a replacement for the woodland that will be mined by this company at the Vickery extension site. Whitehaven have already had two extensions to preclude this and other offsets in perpetuity and to my knowledge these have not be finalized, long past their consent conditions dates.

If Whitehaven are to use mine site rehabilitation to make up the total offset area for the Vickery Extension then I would hope that rehabilitation on Rocglen mine site is not representative of what can be expected, it is certainly not to a standard that would go anywhere near replacing the cleared areas of the footprint of this Vickery mine extension, although at a recent combined CCC meeting we were informed that a survival rate of 1 tree per hectare would meet consent conditions.

### **Floodplains**

There needs to be a comprehensive flood monitoring and mitigation Management Plan before any consideration of approval for the Vickery Extension.

At the last Combined CCC meeting there were questions posed regarding the planting of trees on offset properties on the flood plains, this question, and comment was directed to the representative from Planning and Approval that attended the meeting, the question and comment was - Have you done flood monitoring? – if not, you should.

The Department representatives answer was – No requirement to do flood monitoring.

Although this question was regarding the planting of trees on the floodplain, the same question should be asked, what will happen when the next big flood spills from the banks of the Namoi now that there are road and rail overpasses that will most certainly impact and re-direct the usual flow of flood water from the Namoi River upstream and downstream and near the Kamilaroi Highway. If the Vickery Extension is approved, there will be another rail

\* Dust from a WHC blast event have been photographed at a distance of approximately 35kms at Emerald Hill.

spur and more infrastructure near the Namoi River that could alter the direction of the flow of flood water on the floodplains, this re-direction of flood waters could cause catastrophic damage to farming lands, residences, infrastructure and the roads further down-stream.

Minor changes to the floodplains can easily divert flood water, so the next major flood will be a disaster waiting to happen and very costly to the community and local Shire.

### **Concern of ever-changing Management Plans.**

It is a given that sometimes plans need to be altered, but over the past 8 years of dealing with the mining companies in our district it has become very clear to myself and many community members that the altering of Management Plans are used to completely change the way they operate, and these changes are word changes in these plans that then allow loop-holes for the company to cut costs and alter how they operate, and yet somehow stay within their consent conditions. For example, in the initial Management Plans Whitehaven said they would not bury waste such as tyres, now they have changed their Management Plan wording by leaving out just one paragraph which now allows them to bury their tyres.

I truly hope that this hearing committee listens and hears the concerns of local people who will be impacted by this Vickery Extension if it is approved. If this hearing is to be an independent hearing, I would ask with respect that the commissioners take into consideration all the impacts that this open cut coal mine will have on the local residents, as well as the Cumulative Environmental impact to this rural district. Especially the use of water by this new extension that could literally suck the underground water resources dry and impact the surface water and leave this community without the ability to survive as a productive rural community.

Roselyn Druce.