

Katherine Brooks Submission

I am a concerned local farmer with 2 properties between Aberdeen and Scone. My family, The McPhees, have a long farming history in the Scone region, going back to 1837 when our ancestors arrived.

I breed cattle and grow hay. Water is a very precious commodity; without water I can't feed my cattle or produce hay to help other farmers feed their livestock.

Do we know how the underground water could be affected if the troubled Dartbrook mine is permitted to reopen? Judging from the transcript of the proponent's meeting with the Commissioners and the CEO's comments at a public meeting in Aberdeen on Sunday, April 7, it seems this proponent has taken the view that they'll jump off that bridge when they come to it. This position is of major concern as water was such an issue when the mine was originally operating.

Following 3 deaths and facing ongoing dangers from gas, flooding and spontaneous combustion the Dartbrook Underground Mine was mothballed by Anglo American, a large highly experienced mining company.

Despite these known risks, Australian Pacific Coal a new, inexperienced mining company has applied to re-open the safety-troubled mine. Can we be guaranteed that they can, and will manage the water issues that plagued Anglo American? Without experience or strong financial backing can we be sure they will not have a detrimental effect on our precious water supply?

Has Australian Pacific Coal conducted extensive, independent studies to ascertain the potential impact on our air quality and water? James Bailey has conducted environmental assessments for Australian Pacific Coal. I'm aware of an article which appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on June 25, 2011 raising questions regarding Mr Bailey's impartiality with regard to the approval of the Shenhua mine in Gunnedah, can we have faith in his studies?

And do Australian Pacific Coal have the critical financial capabilities to resolve an unexpected disaster or will the Government and the community be left to bear the environmental and social cost.

The time is not right, we are in a serious drought which has also impacted our scarce water resources.

People across Australia are concerned for the farmers and communities suffering this 1 in 100-year drought so why consider reopening this troubled mine with the potential to impact our precious water and a strong agricultural industry.

I am also a member of the Aberdeen Revitalisation committee. The Upper Hunter Shire Council has tasked our group to develop ways in which we can revitalise Aberdeen, to enhance the town's natural beauty and historical significance, making Aberdeen a more appealing town to live in and to help generate greater tourism in the area.

Aberdeen has a rich Scottish heritage situated on the beautiful banks of the Hunter River.

A river walk meandering along the banks of the pristine Hunter River is one of the planned projects to enhance Aberdeen both for residents and visitors.

How will the Dartbrook mine impact the future plans for Aberdeen?

What will the visual and noise impact be with 192 B DOUBLES loaded with dirty coal thundering across our fertile river flats every day? What will be the impact of stockpiling and loading unwashed coal at the Dartbrook CHPP, where we understand huge coal trains will be loaded at any time of the day or night, seven days a week?

The Dartbrook mine is on the doorstep of Aberdeen only 1.3kms away!

Our rural area and communities are already suffering from the pollution from existing mining operations. On numerous days there is a strong sulphurous/bitumen smell in the air from uncontrolled spontaneous combustion of coal. Fine particles of overburden and coal dust travel long distances on the prevailing wind. From our point of view pollution from existing mining operations cannot and is not controlled and the burden is carried by our farmland, our farm animals and the food we produce.

Our experience particularly over the past 10 years is that pollution from mining operations pervades our farm land and our communities and there is little the EPA can do to mitigate this, despite many attempts by the community to encourage the EPA to do what we, as a community believe is their role. Quite simply, we see that our only opportunity to prevent pollution is at the approval stage.

The reopening of the Dartbrook export coal mine is all about shareholder profit, not jobs, not about the people whose health, lives and livelihoods are at stake, not even about providing energy for NSW and certainly not about the future.

With abundant sunshine and wind, we should be looking to produce clean, non-polluting power. Destroying the remaining fertile and productive agricultural land is a crime, once the land is mined, it's effectively destroyed.

Together with us, the Government should be fostering local communities to grow existing non mining industries and to develop new industries, so that when the mines close there is a vibrant and sustainable community left behind. The unfettered growth and expansion of the mining industry into the pristine Upper Hunter is unwanted,

unnecessary and will constrain our aspiration to maintain a healthy environment, where existing and new industries can prosper.

So many in our community are vehemently opposed to the Dartbrook reopening as demonstrated at a community forum in Aberdeen on Sunday, April 7 attended by well over 100 concerned residents.

Don't you think it's time to say no to reopening the troubled Dartbrook mine?

Thank you