

John Hindmarsh

Chair, Panel members, ladies and gentlemen

My name is John Hindmarsh, I am currently a beef cattle farmer living in the Upper Hunter and a former member of the Singleton mining community and I support the Rix's Creek South Continuation of Mining Project SSD 6300.

Over the past five years I have leased 55 hectares of rehabilitated mined land on the Rix's Creek site and graze my beef cattle on this land. The land leased at Rix's Creek has become a critical component of my drought strategy, allowing me to maintain the nucleus of my breeding herd.

For those who don't know me, I believe my background is relevant to my presentation.

I am a fourth generation land owner and beef cattle grazier, with my family property being located in the Upper Hunter and continuously held in the Hindmarsh family since 1862.

My professional credentials are demonstrated by my Bachelor of Rural Science and my employment history, initially with 12 years experience during the 80's and early 90's, working with the NSW Soil Conservation Service. During this time I was directly involved in conservation farming, when the ideas of minimal tillage and direct drilling of crops and pastures were in their infancy.

In the mid 90's I decided to see if I could make a difference using my skills and knowledge and took up a position as Environmental Officer at Rix's Creek Mine in 1996 and continued in the environmental team until I retired in July 2017.

An initial part of my role was to develop and build on the rehabilitation program at Rix's Creek and then later the supervision and implementation of the rehabilitation program.

I think it is important to remind ourselves of the legal commitments pertaining to post mining land use that the Rix's Creek mine currently operates under. As stated in the Rix's Creek Mine current Mining Operation Plan (Ver 1.2 31 Aug 2018), referred to as the MOP, the operation *"is committed to reinstating the pre-mining land capability of grazing land, with stable landforms, compatible with the surrounding landscape, and allow for a range of possible post-mining land-uses"*.

Further to this the objectives of the rehabilitation program, as stated in the MOP, as they pertain to the landform and vegetation in context of grazing and pasture management include:

- Landform
 - Rehabilitated land will be safe and stable.
 - Land capability will be returned to a class similar to that existing prior to the commencement of mining.
 - Mined land will be re-contoured to a landform compatible with the surrounding natural landscape and to
 - Reinstating a stable drainage network.
- Vegetation
 - A sustainable vegetation cover will be established on rehabilitated land.
 - Grazing areas will be established with a range of species suitable for pasture production in the area and
 - Rehabilitated land will be topsoiled, fertilised and sown with grass species.

Evidence of the success of the Rix's Creek rehabilitation program has been demonstrated through a range of activities and studies.

The site and the rehabilitation program have been showcased via site tours on numerous occasions including the Best Practice Ecological Rehabilitation of Mined Lands Conference. These tours have demonstrated to visitors examples of the success of the rehabilitation program where grazing is the defined post-mining land use.

From 2012 through until 2017 a site based trial was undertaken to assess the quality and quantity of pasture produced on post mined land and to determine the suitability of these lands for grazing. These trials demonstrated that improved pastures sown on rehabilitated land can be more productive than undisturbed native and naturalised pastures on equivalent soils.

Scientifically based studies undertaken in partnership with the NSW DPI under the Upper Hunter Mining Dialogue grazing trial, compared cattle grazing on rehabilitated mine land verse un-mined lands.

The results from these studies, as published in the ACARP C23053 October 2018 report, indicate cattle weight gain per hectare on post mined pastures was more than double that achieved on the analogue sites.

The Upper Hunter Mining Dialogue Grazing trial has been now expanded and I understand that the focus is to assess the capability of the land in terms of achieving a post-mining grazing outcome. These studies include lands at Rix's Creek where my cattle graze.

When checking on my cattle recently, members of the research team were on site and provided me with an update on the studies. One finding that I found to be of great interest and evidence of a sustainable grazing system, was the presence of earthworms and dung beetles.

As a farmer, I understand that the key to a successful beef cattle program is all about weight gains and optimising economic returns when the cattle are sent to market. Monitoring that I have undertaken on my cattle at Rix's Creek reflect weight gains of between 0.5-0.7kg/day over the period the cattle were grazing on the rehabilitation. These growth rates are similar to those results obtained from the Upper Hunter Mining Dialogue grazing trial. It should also be remembered that the weight gains of my cattle have been achieved during times which include drought conditions.

The value of the land that I lease at Rix's Creek has been reinforced to me by local graziers who view these rehabilitated pasture areas as highly prized grazing land and a beneficial addition to any grazing farm business.

The pasture areas of post mined land that I lease at Rix's Creek are an integral and important component of my farming business. The future success of my business would be placed in jeopardy if the Rix's Creek South Continuation of Mining Project is refused.

So probably more than anyone in this room, I understand first hand and from 22 years site based experience at Rix's I know and understand the challenges that are associated with the rehabilitation program at Rix's Creek. I know that the soils can be problematic, weeds can be a real issue, yes dust and noise need to be managed, however at the end of the day the ability to meet the objectives of the rehab program and the underpinning results of the rehab trials and studies speak for themselves.

As a nation and more importantly as a region we need coal mining , you will hear today from individuals whose livelihood and in turn their families rely on mining, whether they be an operator at Rix's or a business that helps to feed and house the members of the mining community, the flow on benefits are enormous.

Right across the Singleton area we witnessed the impact of the down turn in mining during 2013 – shops shut, sales of cars and non essential items fell, house prices dropped and property investors fled the area. The coal mining industry is highly regulated and constantly under public scrutiny, however it is the status of the rehab program that is so often used as the gauge under which the entire industry is assessed.

The rehab at Rix's has been repeatedly shown to have met the core goals of being safe, stable and non polluting, and the ability to develop sustainable pastures on post mined landscapes. At an individual level I have witnessed the success of the rehab program, my cattle are healthy and gaining weight every day and all being well their off spring will sell at optimal prices.

So in closing I would like to make it extremely clear that I support the approval of the Rix's Creek South Continuation of Mining Project SSD 6300.

Thank you.