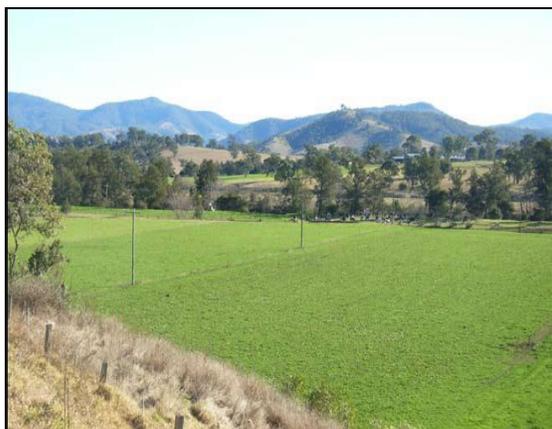


Wiimali Chronicle

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Sunny, High 36, Low 28

Impact of Coal Mining in the Wiimali Area: Concerns Escalate



2000 - Productive farm land



2010 – Wiimali open cut coal mine

A social impact study undertaken by researchers from the University of New South Wales has identified a number of previously unreported concerns about coal mining in our area. Although undoubtedly good for the economy and local jobs there may be bigger issues at stake in Wiimali.

Loss of generational farming communities

The Wiimali area has many families descended from the first white settlers in the region. Their land titles have only been in one name. Wiimali Coal Mine Inc. commenced buying out these families in the late '90s. Proposals for new coal mines threaten to further erode the social continuity of the area.

Loss of social cohesion in isolated communities

Two communities close to Wiimali have lost a substantial

population. The general store and other local businesses have closed down and there are concerns that the primary school will have to close due to the close proximity of the open mine. Both communities have been impacted by loss of social cohesion.

Loss of productive farming land

The new open cut mine proposals for Wiimali will further impact on prime agricultural land with permanent ground water. Some of the most fertile and productive land in the state is in the Wiimali area.

Loss of water supply

The loss of base flows to creeks and rivers caused by destruction of groundwater systems is a major problem for the environment and local water users. The loss of bores (or bore pressure) and springs has also occurred. It is very difficult to

prove that the neighbouring mine is the cause of the water loss and even if proven compensation for loss of water will not help the farming industry now.

Noise, dust and light pollution

The industrial noise guidelines set by the state government are far higher than the background noise levels in remote rural areas such as Wiimali. Low frequency vibration from large mine machinery operating 24 hours per day is also not adequately monitored or regulated. There have also been reports that some local people have been subjected to loud horns from passing road and rail traffic at odd periods throughout the night.

Dust levels and increased diesel fumes concern community members both in and outside the so called the 'affectation zone'. Local weather patterns have a great deal of influence on air

quality. Monitoring is not continuous and is reported in averages. This negates the influence of spikes in dust and air borne contaminants due to winds speeds and direction

Coal mines are obliged to monitor particulate matter of 10 micron or less. Dust particles less than 10 micrometers in diameter come from crushing or grinding operations, and dust from paved or unpaved roads. They pose a health concern because they can be inhaled into and accumulate in the respiratory system, the finer the more invasive. However monitoring does not adequately measure the more dangerous very fine dust particles that are less than 2.5 micron in diameter (emitted from all types of combustion (diesel motor vehicles, power plants).

Mine lighting creates a form of

visual pollution that obscures starlight. A clear night sky, highly valued by many people seeking a quieter country lifestyle can be obliterated by a large coal mine.

Loss of property value

Properties outside the immediate coal resource area that have not been identified in the Government's conditions of approval as being eligible for purchase by the mining company have decreased in market value. This is because of the impact on the local amenity. Some properties have lost convenient access routes.

Increased traffic movements

Large increases in traffic flow along Heathcliffe Road have caused major concern to local residents and school bus operators. The transport of large machinery and equipment to the

new proposed mine site during construction will be additional to the regular shift traffic from the Wiimali mine. If a new mine is approved another fleet of mine workers will use the road on a daily basis. The cumulative impact of this increased traffic movement have not been adequately addressed in planning documents.

Increased rail movements

Coal trains are very heavy and very loud. The increased train movements on the northern line were not included in any noise studies conducted during environmental assessments.

Increased coal train movements of up to 4 a day through Wiimali will occur if the new mine is approved. The impact on rail crossings and traffic flow in the town has not been adequately assessed.

Calls to fix deadly stretch of road

A community campaign is gearing up to force the state government to fix a notorious stretch of the motorway at Wiimali, after yet another multiple vehicle crash. The two kilometre section of the motorway near Wiimali railway station and the hospital roundabout has been the scene of up to a dozen serious crashes this year, and for the last 10 years at least. Two people were seriously injured in a crash there over the weekend and a 27 year old man was killed there last month. John Friend is one local resident pushing for improvements after his

daughter suffered brain damage in an accident two years ago. "Drivers enter the 90K/hr motorway, often after they've been drinking. The road is very poorly designed and very badly constructed," he said. "The only way to fix it is to tear it up and build it properly." "The RTA would need to put drainage down the median strip, and drain the water away that way, but that would cost an absolute fortune."

State member for Wiimali George Lucas acknowledges there is a problem with the

roadway and says the RTA must take another look at it. "We have resurfaced the road on both approaches to the roundabout but both times the road has been washed away after heavy rain," he said. A community meeting will be held at Wiimali Bowling Club on March 30 to discuss the campaign to get the motorway fixed.

