

FIONA SIMSON

NSW Farmers Mining Spokesperson

Contact Numbers:

(02) 6747 6251

0427 476 251

Fiona Simson is a farmer from the Liverpool Plains region and the Chair of the NSW Farmers' Association Mining Taskforce.

"The Association is not opposed to mining. We simply want equal treatment under the law, a balanced and scientific approach to deciding where and how mining occurs, diligent management of risk, and just terms compensation for all affected landholders when mining does go ahead.

"Mining cannot be assessed on a 'project by project' basis and without consideration for cumulative impacts, or the government's longer term plans for a district. We must ensure sustainable use of our valuable natural resources to guarantee the protection and production of food and fibre for future generations. Living on the Liverpool plans, we have seen the

gradual destruction by coal mining of the way of life of our farming neighbours in the Upper Hunter.

"We have seen the contamination and loss of ground water, air pollution by dust, the absence of independent monitoring, and continual denial of responsibility and broken promises by both the government and mining companies.

"We are continually told how important mining is to the economy. But this does not justify the fast tracking and corner cutting we are seeing. What about the impact on agriculture and food and fibre production? Coal mines in particular have complex, long term impacts, which need diligent consideration prior to any approval being granted."

Case Studies - Mining

Case Study 1- Wendy Bowman, Ashton Pastoral Co - Singleton

Contact Numbers: (02) 65761957 or 0427 400 837

Wendy Bowman's property, ASHTON PASTORAL CO (APC), was a dairy farming enterprise. In 1986, the property next to APC was purchased by Costain Australia. No buffer zone was enforced between the two properties - mining began on the fence line.

"Our property began to be covered in dust as soon as the mining operations commenced, to the extent that our milk was rejected due to contamination," Mrs Bowman said.

The property borders Bowmans Creek, Glennies Creek and the Hunter River. When lucerne began dying it took the Bowman family some time to establish that it was due to water quality from these creeks.

"The mining company employed someone to look at the issue, and suggested that the problem was nematodes, a type of worm, but no evidence was provided."

Mrs Bowman later discovered that Bowman's creek had actually collapsed up stream and did not flow for 2km, then came back up via a spring. The water, which had passed through the mining pits contained high levels of salinity.

"We found that even the water from the Hunter River was very contaminated due to Bowmans Creek joining close to the extraction point," she said. "The State Pollution Control Commission allowed two different mines to discharge up to 2 megalitres of untreated mine water into the Hunter River every day. This



actually led to establishment of the Hunter River Salinity Trading Scheme."

In 1991 Mrs Bowman was forced to dry off half the herd and her share-farmer was forced to leave the property. She approached the mining company to buy her property as farming was becoming untenable. The mining company originally refused to purchase the property wanting to prove that mining and dairying could co-exist. After four years she finally sold the farm.

"We had no compensation of any sort ever provided by Government and very little from the mining company, despite the fact that these actions very clearly made our business untenable."

Case Study 2- Tim Duddy, Rossmar Park – Carroona

Contact Numbers: (02) 67474683 or 0427 106 267

Tim Duddy grew up on Rossmar Park in the Breeza district of New England where some of the earliest broadacre wheat farming and irrigation in the district took place. Returning to the family farming interests five years ago, Mr Duddy became acutely aware of the huge environmental shortfalls of the NSW planning process.

He says “the careless development of mining is at odds with maintaining the agricultural integrity of our highly productive district. Water is paramount to survival of mankind and this district is blessed with a huge resource.

“Development is essential for the entire region to progress but we must insist that this development is environmentally sustainable for all time.”

Recently a local coalition of farmers, the Carroona Coal Action Group failed in their attempt to have the NSW Land and Environment Court stop coal exploration on the Liverpool Plains.

The Group had argued that the process of issuing BHP Billiton a licence to look for coal on about 340 square kilometres of land (more than 10 times the area of the City of Sydney) near Gunnedah was flawed.

Mr Duddy says the group is considering another legal challenge.

“When people own land, they have certain rights pertaining to that land. The Mining Act is designed to take precedent over every other industry, every other land owner,” he says.

“Australian agricultural producers depend on adequate guarantees and security arrangements to protect the natural resources upon which they rely.

“Ensuring the security and protection of water assets in particular, is of paramount importance. Key to this is a fair and equitable process for managing the mining and agricultural interface and ensuring that farmers’ concerns are given due consideration.”

It is Tim Duddy’s and the Carroona Coal Action Group’s belief that the current process of mining exploration is unfair to farmers and insufficient consideration is given to the impact of exploration on farmers’ rights and impact on the land and water resources.

“Current legislation is inadequate to protect viable and valuable agricultural lands and there is insufficient information on the impact of mining practices on groundwater resources,” he said.

Case Study 3- Louise Crites-Foster, Opal Mining

Contact Numbers: 02 6828 8485 or 0437 863 449

Louise Crites-Foster is the spokesperson for graziers in the Walgett Shire/Lightning Ridge Mining Reserve. Ms Crites-Foster is a registered wool classer and has been an active partner in a third generation merino wool/sheep meat grazing enterprise for the past fifteen years.

The Mining Reserve was created by Government in 1989 as a monopoly for small opal miners. Most of the land in the south east of the Shire is suitable for cropping while the land in the west and north, where opal mining occurs, is rangeland and better suited for grazing.

Much of landholder concerns relate to the way opal mining takes place, and the lack of timely and appropriate rehabilitation. The burning issues of mine closure, effective working of claims, and compensation have still not been adequately addressed after 25 years of dialogue.

“The exploration and mine operations have significant psychological and social impacts on affected landholders. What is simply a potential mine location for a miner may be for others a home, or a livelihood.” Ms Crites-Foster said.

Ms Crites-Foster believes consultation must not simply be confined to gaining consent to begin mining operations. Additional costs are incurred as a result of the presence of mining. The adverse effects are not necessarily restricted to the mine site. Understanding of the full extent of mining impacts requires consideration of indirect, more subtle impacts involving, for example, alteration of hydrological regimes, animal behaviour patterns and pastoral management strategies.

“The impact of opal mining poses inherent risks to the basic rights of men and women on the land. Pastoral businesses are most commonly affected by the disruption to established grazing management systems, the reduction of stock numbers, and forced closure of paddocks affected by intense mining activity.” Ms Crites-Foster said.

Ms Crites-Foster believes that mining conditions must be mandatory under the Mining Act and its regulations, rather than discretionary, as is currently the situation. Mining conditions are relevant to all mining operations, and should not be applied selectively when the mining registrar or officer of the Department considers it appropriate.

“It is essential to include penalty provisions for failure to comply with the licence conditions. These licence conditions must then be adequately enforced to ensure the property rights of landholders are protected. Currently, this is not occurring in opal mining areas,” Ms Crites-Foster said.