

Nationals Weak Motion Disappointing

It was disappointing to see The Nationals introduce a further watered-down motion in the Federal Senate this week, eight months are pledging their full support and encouraging us to lobby every member of parliament to protect our land and water to help them “*get the numbers*”.

Their motion “*acknowledges the concern expressed by some local farmers*” when the phrase “most farmers” would have been more accurate. As outlined by Sandy Blomfield in his recent Advocate rebuttal, very few landholders have given their consent compared to those who have clearly said “No”. The vast majority of holes have been drilled on easy targets: State forest, council roads and reserves.

It’s puzzling the Nationals also don’t realise this is not just a local issue any more. Whilst they allude to other Prime Ag Land targetted for destruction, this is not just about farmers - such inappropriate developments are of concern to people in many city and rural communities and those downstream. CCAG has a diverse and growing membership and support comes from country and city-folk alike concerned about the unbalanced direction in which NSW and QLD governments are headed and, ultimately, where their food is going to come from. Like us, they are not anti-mine, but wish to see a sensible balance between primary resources and thereby genuine, Commonwealth-based protection for their food and water supplies.

By “*calling on the respective state governments to ensure that appropriate and thorough independent environmental assessments, including the impact on groundwater systems, are undertaken in advance of any approval to mine*”, the motion misses several important points:

i) experience shows us that the State government can not be trusted to take any notice of environmental assessments, independent or otherwise, and currently refuses to rule out granting a mining lease before any independent water study is completed;

ii) that pollution is already happening in the coal, gas and power station generation industries with government knowledge and sanction, as no action on these polluters is forthcoming;

iii) and that according to this State government there is no balance between resources required: “*mining is more important than agriculture*”.

Fundamentally, this motion appears to legitimize State government processes that have repeatedly been shown to be fundamentally flawed.

CCAG remains apolitical but I for one remain disappointed that these supporters can offer such a weak motion after eight months of sustained political pressure and a full understanding of what’s at stake here.

Pauline Roberts 21st June 2009

from Hansard: Motion raised in Other Business 17th June 2009

ENVIRONMENT—COAL EXPLORATION

Senator Nash, at the request of the Leader of The Nationals in the Senate (Senator Joyce) and pursuant to notice of motion not objected to as a formal motion, moved general business notice of motion no. 454—That the Senate—

(a) notes the decision by the New South Wales and Queensland governments to allow coal exploration near Caroon, in the centre of the Liverpool Plains, near Gunnedah, and other proposed mining ventures at the Haystack Plains on the Darling Downs, Queensland;

(b) acknowledges the concern expressed by some local farmers and members of the local communities about this exploration; and

(c) calls on the respective state governments to ensure that appropriate and thorough independent environmental assessments, including the impact on groundwater systems, are undertaken in advance of any approval to mine in these regions of high agricultural significance. Question put and passed.