

Landholders dispute Information

Sandy Blomfield has provided information that some landholders are disputing information appearing in the Quirindi Advocate of May 6 titled "Warden's Court Hearing."

A ruling on the hearing is yet to be made.

However, Mr Blomfield states that there was an affidavit presented in the Warden's Court in Gunnedah (Brown v CMAL and Alcorn v CMAL) which clearly disputed adherence to both the Environmental Management Plan and licence conditions.

He says "While there may be no 'documented evidence' of environmental damage from drilling there is indisputable environmental damage occurring. BHP is peddling the 'no evidence' line with the knowledge that there has not been adequate bench marking done on which to base damage, nor adequate or appropriate testing done during or post drilling to make a meaningful assessment.

"At every drill site a cocktail of chemicals including drillers mud, cement, and toxins released from the strata (such as mercury and arsenic) is purposely pumped into aquifers and permeable material to prevent the inflow of water and the holes from caving in, and to assist the drilling procedure. Pumping such material into aquifers is contamination. Contamination is environmental damage. Open, unlined sumps are dug at every drill site and any waste not pumped into the aquifers and other permeable stratum during the drilling of

the hole is transferred to Quirindi Waste Depot for disposal resulting in both on and off site contamination.

"The reference that there have been 220 holes drilled through bedrock, 111 of which are on the floodplain, and that the majority were commissioned by landholders is totally incorrect. This has been pointed out to BHP on numerous occasions by individual landholders, through the Community Consultative Committee and even in arbitration hearings, yet they persist in stating it as 'fact'.

"While a small number of landholder bores do reach bedrock most do not, and it is extremely rare for any to extend through it. Mining and gas companies are the only ones interested in drilling through the bedrock which acts as a cross contamination barrier between shallow and deep aquifers. BHP themselves have said there are no aquifers below the bedrock. (although coal itself is a recognised aquifer containing a considerable number of toxins)

"Again there is no 'documented evidence' of contamination simply because the benchmarking and testing is not being done. It is simply a biased assumption. Given the lack of benchmarking and data it is equally correct to state there is no documented evidence that there is not contamination.

Mr Blomfield comments on the remarks from BHP that "it will continue to be

responsive to landholder concerns and look for ways to make exploration drilling less impactful for the landholder" and "BHP has worked successfully with the existing access agreements with a number of landholders," as "BHP has purchased four properties. It has made access arrangements with the LPSC, Gunnedah Shire Council, State Forests and about seven landholders. There are about twenty landholders who have not been approached and at least seventeen landholders who have rejected the BHP access agreement. The number who have been granted access is extremely small and those who have rejected BHP's access agreement have been totally dissatisfied with BHP's preparedness to address concerns."

BHP's assurances that they are not considering: (a) mining under the deep alluvial aquifer (b) long wall mining under the floodplain and (c) open cut mining anywhere in the Caroonah EL are meaningless, he says. There may be some degree of honesty in the statement if it is taken within an imminent timeframe. There have been numerous unsuccessful attempts to get categorical statements from BHP that they will never undertake these activities, and they will not agree to excising the floodplains from the lease area.

It will be interesting to see what is the finding of the Warden's Court.