

Date: 20th May, 2009

LIVERPOOL PLAINS MUST BE PROTECTED

A Senate Select Committee has been told it is the last hope for the farming community of the Liverpool Plains as they battle mining interests.

Senator John Williams, Nationals Senator for New South Wales, was a member of the Select Committee on Food Security that yesterday toured farmland in the Caroon area and then conducted a public hearing in Gunnedah.

The visit fulfilled a commitment given by the Nationals when they met with the Caroon landowners in January.

BHP has been granted an exploration licence over a wide area but has been prevented from entering private land by a community blockade.

Senator Williams said there is no disputing the Liverpool Plains encompasses some of the best farming country in Australia, and its moisture profile enables summer and winter crops to be grown even in drought years.

"The yield for wheat crops is 36 percent higher than the State average, sorghum 28 percent higher and barley 20 percent higher.

On a comparative basis it is the most highly productive farmland in New South Wales and equal to any dryland production in the nation.

Yet by issuing an exploration licence to BHP for coal, the State Government is putting this vital food bowl at grave risk.

I am appalled that New South Wales Minister for Primary Industries and Mineral Resources Ian Macdonald

has not visited the Liverpool Plains despite repeated invitations.

The New South Wales Government greedily puts its hand out for the licence fees from these mining companies but then abandons those likely to be affected.

The Senate Select Committee will also take evidence from mining companies and then consider amendments to legislation", Senator Williams said.

ENDS

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