



22<sup>nd</sup> November 2011

Prof David Shearman

Secretary,

Doctors for the Environment Australia

Dear Professor Shearman

I am writing to ask if you could please bring the health experience and expertise of your organisation to help us with a matter of extreme concern to our community. It is regarding the proposed Stage 3 expansion of New Hope Corporation (NHC) open cut coal mine, a Project of State Significance currently under consideration by the Queensland Coordinator General, Mr Keith Davies. The Oakey Coal Action Alliance is greatly concerned about this large mine due to existing and future health and social impacts on nearby residents. Residents of Acland, Jondaryan and Muldu are already experiencing intolerable living conditions and impaired health which will worsen considerably with approval of the expansion, doubling output from 4.8 million tonnes per annum to nearly 10 million tonnes per annum of coal.

#### Summary of the project

Acland is a small town 14 km north of Oakey, and is part of the Walloon coal measure. Its previous population was between 200-400 people.

There were a number of small underground collieries in the district including the Acland No 2 Colliery, a unique complex on the QLD Heritage Register. It ran from 1911-1984 and as a museum thereafter. Acland had a proud history of Tidy Town participation including judged QLD first Tidiest Town in 1990, due largely to the community parks and gardens established by Mrs Thelma Beutel. Acland is located in good quality agricultural land which supported 5 generations of farming families.

1999 New Hope (a subsidiary of Soul Pattison Group) purchased coal tenements from Shell. In 2002 Acland Stage 1 was opened followed by Stage 2 2005. Stage 1 and 2 comprise 2000 hectares of agricultural land and produces 4.8 million tonnes per annum of high grade coal.

When New Hope moved to the district they assured everyone that they would not mine near the town of Acland, that the town and school would actually grow. They started purchasing private and public properties within the town site in 2004-2005 and the town officially closed in 2005. One resident landowner, Mr Glenn Beutel who owns 11 blocks within Acland, has refused to sell and there is also a tenant family in one of his houses.

To date over 55 farms and 60 homes have been bought and removed or left to deteriorate in situ. NHC intends knocking down the heritage listed colliery and beautiful park, moving the war memorial to nearby Kulpi.

Stage 3 proposal is for mining 5400 hectares of land, leaving 560 hectares of final voids and diverting Lagoon Creek 8.2 km with greatly increased flooding risks to downstream Jondaryan. The edge of this massive pit will be less than 5km from Oakey and separated by one road width from nearby farms and residences. The proposed mine will result in greenhouse emissions representing 4% of Australia's total

emissions (based on NHC Environmental Impact Statement figures and 2006 levels). We believe this is an underestimation as these figures did not include land clearing, a proposed petrochemical plant processing 1-2 million tonnes per annum of coal to crude oil, nor further on-processing of this substrate.

Currently a decision is pending regarding Stage 3 by the QLD Coordinator General and is expected within months. Mr Davies has recently visited the area to meet with OCAA members and Acland and Jondaryan residents about the serious issues listed below. NHC has been asked repeatedly to provide more supplementary information, including the impacts of noise and dust; the potential for increased risk of damage to properties and infrastructure from flooding; the loss of cropping land; and a requirement for the proponent to institute effective communication with the community. The company is currently for sale and attracting international bids. NHC are widely advertising their confidence of approval of this development. No coal mine application has been knocked back to date in Queensland.

Current and Future Coal Handling

Coal from Stage 3 will be transported off site via train or truck largely to NHC owned port facility at Brisbane. The following table explains the differential coal handling at increasing outputs (10 Mtpa is expected within 4 years of approval of expansion).

Planned Production Destinations (from Table 3.14 EIS)

Transport method	Destination	4.8 Mtpa	10Mtpa
Rail	Export Brisbane port	3.8	7.5
Rail	Domestic Ipswich	0.2	0.3
Road	Domestic Ipswich	0.75	0.75
	Domestic SEQ	0.25	0.25
	Domestic Tarong	0	0.1
Road or conveyor	Local CTL plant on adjacent land*	0	1.1

\*CTL = proposed coal to liquid plant. This is repeatedly mentioned in the EIS, but the proponent will not answer our questions about this. They state in the EIS it will be subject to Local Council By-regulations only, yet we are very concerned that this noxious and polluting industry will be located at Muldu or Balgowan, 2 or 3 kilometres from Acland and near neighbouring farms and houses (this information was provided by Mr Bruce Denney, Chief Operations Manager but was later retracted by the company). It should be noted that the proponent has invested heavily in overseas CTL technology and is developing a pilot plant at Ipswich. Without this CTL technology there is no further capacity for transport of coal output from the site. There is no mention of health, social or environmental impacts from this CTL technology, despite the terms of reference stating that all ‘direct, indirect and cumulative impacts from the project should be addressed within the EIS’. We mention this here because we feel this technology may also have potential serious health impacts on residents in addition to those below, and NHC has been far from open and honest with our community.

Health concerns to nearby residents

1. Dust and noise. Farming families have had to tolerate levels of dust, noise, light and vibrations above state limits and apparently this is acceptable. Children are chronically unwell with respiratory illnesses.

Asthma is common also. Other symptoms described by some nearby farmers are daily nose bleeds, weeping eyes and noses, dizziness, headaches and sometimes an inability to get out of bed. Some of these sound like Nitrate symptoms and recently all the coal mines in South East Queensland were closed for a few weeks due to exceedences outside the blasting boundary at Acland.

We have been worried about orange blast clouds that settle in adjacent valleys depending on weather conditions. Vibrations from blasting can be felt 30 km away. New Hope is a particularly difficult company that has had poor community relations and responses to complaints; their dust and noise monitoring is flawed, apparently they rarely complete three consecutive months readings in troublespots (after three high readings they have to be investigated by Government officials), they accuse people of making their symptoms up. One lady who took NHC to court because they planned a 5000 head feedlot on their boundary had their medical specialist expert tell her she is not an asthmatic but a drug addict who needed to go off all her medications... Monitoring has been for PM 10, except for Jondaryan where NHC was recently told to install PM 2.5 monitors. They have not released any of these PM 2.5 results. They have this week refused to test for PM<sub>2.5</sub> or heavy metals for the family with very young and chronically unwell children near the mine site.

2. Coal contamination of homes and water supplies. Jondaryan and Muldu are the worst affected but as coal trains are uncovered this is a problem we believe all the way along the line from Jondaryan to the port of Brisbane. Please see photos of water samples from 1 metre squared washing of a house roof east of Oakey. This house is 0.6 km from the rail line and the dirt on the roof is on that side of the roof only.

Please understand that for the majority of these people rainwater is their only drinking supply.

3. Jondaryan deserves special mention. The Rail Loading Facility (JRLF) is 1.5 km from town on the busy Warrego Hwy. The JRLF was approved for 2 Mtpa in 2002, this permit was extended this year to allow the 4.8mtpa, and the company intends to increase production to 10mtpa using the same facility with minor modification if Stage 3 is allowed.

People's homes are filthy and they are constantly washing and/or painting their homes. Satellite map with view of coal piles can be viewed here:

<http://www.maplandia.com/australia/queensland/rosalie/jondaryan/#map>

The school teachers apparently wash down the play equipment before letting the children outside. Please see photos below of some homes and cars. We know of a least a couple of people who have developed respiratory illnesses since moving to Jondaryan, and others complain of constant cold symptoms or coughing. These are people who cannot afford to move and live elsewhere.

4. Mental health issues. How can we measure or really know the stresses people are under in these communities? Anecdotally we know of a number who are depressed and receiving medication including a 14 year old Jondaryan boy. Others describe the ordeals they go through negotiating with NHC with threatened court actions and mistreatment at the hands of Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) officials who invariably side with the mine. A DERM official recently told a Jondaryan resident that 'she would be shot by now if she lived in China'. We know of a couple of individuals and families who we feel are at breaking point due to their feelings of hopelessness at bettering their living conditions, or the health of their children.

#### Flooding risks

We include this information here as part of the potential health and social impact of the expansion. This area is drained by Lagoon Creek and Doctor's Creek.

Lagoon Creek flows through the Stage 3 land and Jondaryan. It is already subject to flooding, including historically the entire town of Jondaryan and cutting of the Warrego Highway and rail line. We believe in January 2011 the 'controlled' release of mine water exacerbated this flooding, a fact which was reported to Government departments by our members at the time. The proponent intends diverting this watercourse for eight kilometres to mine beneath it, resulting in a straight drain (instead of a creek bed with vegetation, natural bends and impedances) in the direction of Jondaryan. We have spoken to many farmers who have

lived in the district all their lives, and they all agree the likelihood of serious flooding of Jondaryan is extremely high. One Jondaryan landholder has chillingly described their future 'We will be the next Grantham- a wall of water will hit this town with devastating results'.

The southern part of the Stage 3 land drains towards Oakey via Doctor's Creek catchment. The town was seriously flooded in January 2011 with 200 homes evacuated because of both Oakey Creek levels and rising waters across the floodplain of Doctor's Creek. Mining of Stage 3 and release of mine water in the future from the mine pit or voids will likely lead to heightened flooding risk of the homes on Oakey's northside.

#### Our objectives:

Oakey Coal Action Alliance is determined to stop this mine expansion. This is the most abominable development on many environmental, health and social grounds, yet we still feel less than confident that the Queensland Government will reject this project outright. Recently we prepared a comprehensive document outlining an alternative future for Acland with a return to agriculture, tourism, agricultural training and alternative energies. The Government has this information.

We believe that Australia is a prosperous country whose Government should ensure that its people are treated fairly, with the right to live peacefully in their homes, to breathe clean air and drink clean water. This is not happening to the residents of Acland, Muldu or Jondaryan. The impacts on these people and 4400 others in Oakey will be much greater if the mine is permitted to expand. New Hope Coal's proposal does not pass our social, environmental or health impact standards, nor should it pass the Government's standards.

Some links to information about New Hope's Acland Coal mine.

EIS: [http://www.aclandproject.com.au/01\\_cms/details.asp?ID=75](http://www.aclandproject.com.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=75)

#### Recent news reports:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/companies/soul-in-firing-line-as-acland-war-flares/story-fn91v9q3-1226198301439>

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/state-politics/queensland-locals-fuming-as-mine-blasts-send-toxic-clouds-into-neighbourhood/story-e6frgczx-1226158548213>

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/queensland-town-fired-up-over-the-fallout-from-coal/story-e6frg6nf-1226085914942> <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/parable-for-modern-australia/story-e6frg71x-1226077326571>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/29/world/asia/29coal.html>

<http://www.couriermail.com.au/spike/columnists/glen-beutel-is-the-last-man-standing-among-ghosts-at-acland-near-toowoomba/story-e6frereo-1225848992055>

Please contact me if you need further information.

Kindest regards

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Fig 1 Oakey roof wash 0.6km from railway (settled). Photo NL



Fig 2 Roof wash Oakey house 0.6km from railway (inverted)

Fig 3 Jondaryan car, housed in garage (Photo supplied)



Figure 4 External view of Jondaryan house (photo supplied)



Fig 5. 2 days dust inside closed Jondaryan house (photo supplied)

