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5/9/2014.

To whom it may concern,

We implore you to strengthen the Veg. Act and to clarify the duty of care that landholders and miners have as conservationists for the common good. Production and sustainability on farms will increase as vegetation is kept as a proportion of each farm. Miners must automatically have to abide by the protection of the environment and care of threatened species, and keep away from prime agricultural land. Penalties must be consistent and transparent. Stewardship schemes and education programmes are another way to turn around the loss of biodiversity.

We have been productive farmers for 34 years in the rich brigalow- belah soils of the Croppa Creek district. More clearing has occurred here and north to the border and west of the Newell Highway in the last 4 years than has occurred in the previous 3 decades. Tree lines and waterways have disappeared, crown land farmed to the road, infrastructure taken out and dams filled in. All for every square inch of soil. Companies and large landholders know that taking fresh country for farming will give a quick revenue, and this is at the expense of sustainability. Destruction of the small percentage of vegetation that was left in this area leaves us vulnerable to drought, soil erosion, silting of our waterways, loss of ecosystem services, and ultimately, salinity. It is soul destroying to watch our identifiable landscape disappear.

Koalas have been the sentinel species in our environment in the time we have lived here. Quolls and glossy black cockatoos are also documented. As wildlife carers, we have seen the koalas come into care in increasing numbers, and chlamydia has been diagnosed for the first time in our experience. The colonies of koalas have been broken up, and numbers have increased in small areas of scrub, with stress, disease and starvation resulting. One mature male weighed 5kg - half his normal weight - and died in care. The vets in Moree who treat these animals and perform post mortems will verify that the north western koala is in crisis. I collected a dead koala for post mortem west of the highway, and witnessed piles of koala food trees (box gum grassy woodland) bulldozed into heaps for as far as the eye could see. Another such area, close to where we live, was "wiped out" after new

owners took over, and 4 koalas died there since January. We now don't have suitable areas to release rehabilitated koalas.

Offsets for clearing in other regions is not an option. Each area must achieve a balance for improved environmental health within each locality. Respect for and appreciation of the natural environment will result in productivity and community pride. Offsets for the mines have been a disaster for our flora and fauna. Hundreds of koalas have been trapped and relocated on degraded grazing land as offsets for mining. The future very bleak for koalas around the Gunnedah mines.

Having lived up until my marriage in far western Queensland, I know how gentle we have to be with that fragile country if we want to survive financially. I believe our marginal areas have to maintain as much groundcover as possible, and not be farmed. Managing our regrowth has to be done very carefully and with accountability. The bush gives great pleasure when it provides beauty after rain and fauna to amaze us. Ecotourism has not been tapped in our area, and I believe we have much to offer. It is still not too late to turn things around. Intergenerational love compels us to keep intact our bush heritage for future prosperity and wellbeing.

Thank you for considering our opinions.

Yours faithfully,

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