

Media Release 19th March 2012

PICNIC PROTEST CALLS FOR FOOD AND FORESTS OVER DANGEROUS COAL DUST

A group of over 60 people have gathered outside the Boggabri Coal Mine this morning in a picnic protest against three huge open-cut coal mines and expansions proposed for the Leard State Forest near Maules Ck - the Boggabri, Maules Ck and Tarrawonga mines. The protest is a signal of the escalating opposition to coal and gas in the region.

"Local farmers have turned out today to oppose the transformation of Maules Ck, our quiet rural village, into a giant industrial zone with three open-cut coal mines" said Phil Laird, President of the Maules Ck Community Council.

"We estimate that these mines together will dump up to 18,000t of dust on surrounding farms each year, putting our health and the future of our food-producing land at risk.

"The draft Land Use Plan released recently by the NSW Government will not protect us. It does not even require that national air quality standards are met at towns like Maules Ck and Boggabri.

" We are calling on the NSW Government to reconsider their draft Land Use Plan and to ensure that it protects Leard State Forest and surrounding farmland from open-cut coal mining" he said.

"The NSW Government looks set to turn the amazing Leard Forest, one of our most precious natural assets, into an enormous open-cut dust bowl" said Ms Carmel Flint, spokesperson for the Northern Inland Council for the Environment and regional co-ordinator with Lock The Gate Alliance.

"In their draft Land Use Plan, the Government acknowledged for the first time that Leard State Forest is a Tier 1 biodiversity area that 'cannot sustain any further significant loss'.

"However, there are no measures included in the Plan to better protect Leard State Forest and it does not even trigger a 'gateway' for further scientific assessment.

"The chips are down for the threatened plants and animals of Leard State Forest. Their forest home will be bull-dozed and nothing left but a gigantic dust bowl that will drop dangerous coal dust on surrounding farms.

"Big coal companies such as Nathan Tinklers' Aston Resources, Whitehaven and Idemitsu should not be given the green light to put our food producing areas, communities and natural areas at risk.

Photos of protest attached, higher resolution images available on request.

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