



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Paterson Electorate: Coal Exploration

SPEECH

Wednesday, 11 March 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 11 March 2009
Page 98
Questioner
Speaker Baldwin, Robert, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (7.49 pm)—I rise today to speak of a matter which is of grave concern to thousands of constituents in the Paterson electorate: three coal exploration licences held by Gloucester Resources Ltd. The Gloucester community and the local council are vehemently seeking that these licences not be renewed.

Let me say from the outset that I am not opposed to mining per se. However, I do find it irresponsible and incomprehensible that a government of any persuasion at any level would allow a licence to be approved where the implications of a proposed mine would have dire consequences for the established community, natural landscape and local industry. The Gloucester district has an incredible array of valuable natural attributes, and I am advised that any of the proposed mining developments under exploration licences EL6523, EL6524 or EL6563 could be a direct threat to a number of native species of flora and fauna in the region. The Gloucester district is a tranquil and unique landscape rich in natural and cultural diversity and heritage, and the damage associated with these proposed activities could be irreparable.

On Monday, 9 February, more than 850 people gathered in the Gloucester Recreation Centre to express concern about coal exploration on Gloucester's doorstep. At that meeting, the crowd unanimously endorsed Gloucester Shire Council's position that three coal exploration licences held by Gloucester Resources Ltd not be renewed so that no coalmining can ever occur in those areas.

I have met with a number of residents who are genuinely concerned about the devastating impacts that renewing the three coal exploration licences will have on the township of Gloucester. I have also received letters from individuals, families, business owners, farmers and retirees who are convinced that, if the proposed licences were to be renewed, it could spell the death of the township. Concerns raised are about the landscape scenery being damaged forever, reduced water and air quality, increased noise pollution, decreasing long-term employment in the area, reduction in agricultural capabilities and tourism numbers and poorer road conditions. The Gloucester community are unanimous in their view that a balance needs to be achieved. I share with the township a view that longer term developments

such as agriculture, tourism, rural, residential housing and active retirement bring jobs and economic development that are a priority.

The Mayor of Gloucester Shire Council, Julie Lyford, has also raised her concern about the effects of coal mines on the shire, citing the decline of agricultural productivity, residents moving away, reduced tourism opportunities and reduced tree-change migration as very likely consequences of exploration licences being renewed. However, her views were opposed by Ian McDonald, the New South Wales Minister for Primary Industries, Minister for Energy, Minister for Mineral Resources and Minister for State Development, who short-sightedly opposed the calls to suspend the licenses and stated, 'We will renew the licences unless there are compelling circumstances not to.' Unfortunately, the very real concerns presented to the minister about the future sustainability of current industry and the deterioration of the natural environment in the Gloucester shire are not compelling enough for the minister to relinquish the licences, therefore sentencing the township of Gloucester to a much starker and less-prosperous future—one where the shire will struggle to survive on a presently-thriving agricultural and tourism based economy.

This is not the first time that the township of Gloucester has had to survive in the face of adversity. In 1996 I stood before this House and spoke of the failures of the Keating Labor government and New South Wales state government to support the timber industry. This lack of support wiped out hundreds of jobs and numerous opportunities for the township of Gloucester. As such, the township fought hard to reinvent itself and further develop the tourism and agricultural sectors in the region. If the federal government does not support the township of Gloucester's plea then I hold grave concerns for the future prosperity of the shire and its ability to bounce back again.

Whilst I understand that the New South Wales state Labor government is the final authority, I have expressed my concerns in a letter addressed to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts calling on him to listen to the pleas of my constituents about the devastating and irreversible impact that renewing these exploration licences will have on the environment in Gloucester. What we do not need are

moonscapes along each side of the Bucketts Way from Stroud to Gloucester. What we do need is for the federal and state governments to listen to the cries of constituents who live in the town, who have helped build the town and whose livelihoods are dependent on the future sustainability of the town. Gloucester shire is a wonderful area that depends on the natural beauty of its surrounds, including the Barrington Tops. Please do not allow the native fauna and flora and the livelihood of locals to be sacrificed for the sake of the New South Wales government capitalising on mining royalties to repay the debts it has incurred.