

Letters to Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt, Dec 2013

(Click on a title below to jump to that letter)

Contents

Letter from David MacKenzie	2
Letter from Gemma Peat.....	3
Letter from Prue Hewett	5
Letter from Dr Joan Vickers	7
Abridged letter from Dr Craig Allen.....	8
Letter from Kim Wirth	10

Letter from David MacKenzie

Dear Mr Hunt,

Bimblebox Nature Reserve is an important refuge which is part of the National Reserve System. Areas of natural landscape deemed to be significant are set aside for an important reason and are locked into different levels of protection to be allowed to progress at their own natural rate impacted only by fire, flood and drought, all natural processes.

As a retired agricultural and environmental scientist of more than 40 y experience I am acutely aware of the deleterious effects of mining on natural habitats, loss of plants and loss of fauna dependant on the habitat thus lost. Offset areas do not compensate, reserves of all kinds are set aside mostly because of the scarcity of the landscape type they represent, unique means just that, unique, and replacements are not readily found. Mining also impacts deleteriously on groundwater changes and areas not only in Bimblebox but well beyond will be irrevocably changed for the worse by these.

Bimblebox will be lost if mining is allowed on it. The casual throwing away of a reserve under a perpetual conservation covenant sets a dangerous precedent and should not be allowed. Reserves of all types are created for a valid reason, to abrogate any of these is an assault on a community that trusts they will never be abandoned.

Please do not permit the mining of this reserve or anywhere near where the it can be impacted.

Yours faithfully,

David Mackenzie

David H. Mackenzie B.Ag. Sc. (Hons.) UQ

Letter from Gemma Peat

Minister

I've already emailed you about this, and I am emailing again. The proposed mine in Bimblebox concerns not only me but many Australians if what I am reading and hearing is correct.

The families who originally embraced community spirit in the area and decided together to preserve this area deserve to be commended and their efforts deserve to be preserved. The precedent that a decision to mine Bimblebox will create is dangerous. These families signed an agreement with both the State and Federal governments - and if the decision to mine Bimblebox is given the all clear by you - you have broken faith with that community and have damaged yourselves more than I think you realise. You have also damaged the standing of the legal system we live under.

What other communities are going to be betrayed by your government and the government of Queensland? What faith can anyone have in you or your government if you are seen to ignore longstanding agreements and the public mood? If you choose to proceed with an approval for this to go ahead, it will be among the worst decisions you ever make. There are members of that community who have not even been appropriately consulted regarding this - people whose livelihoods depend on Bimblebox - and its preservation. I have seen them weep for their future, their land and their children - I'm wondering, have you bothered to even acknowledge this? Do you even know?

How long before the precedent that mining Bimblebox sets is seized upon and used as a reason to destroy even more of our natural heritage? If Iron Ore is found near Uluru - do you intend to tear that up as well? You've already decided to allow Abbot Point to go ahead and the subsequent dredging and dumping near or maybe even on the Great Barrier Reef - one of the most beautiful and rare places in the entire world. Why should we believe that you would respect or preserve anything of natural and cultural value in the country at all? Do you really not see how dangerous the precedent you would set is?

You have to realise that allowing this to go ahead sets this country on a path that leads only to destruction and heartbreak and grievous loss for the natural environment and the people who require it to find solace and calm and sustenance. Not to mention the economic damage to the country - that cannot be quantified! As the environment minister, you ought to know that mining coal releases carbon dioxide - the economic calamity that waits in the wings if the effects of Climate Change are not addressed will only be hastened if you approve this travesty.

Making long term decisions in government is difficult - I know this - but it has to be done. The way we do things has to change - and it is a massive task - I am well aware of that, but we need to start planning now. We need to move away from this and get to something more efficient and less destructive. ***It always seems impossible until you manage it - but to manage it you have to try.*** I see no effort on by either your

government or the opposition to make the tough but necessary decisions we have to make now. Australian infrastructure is already woefully inadequate - why not seize the chance to build something new and better?

Australia and indeed many other places have to make some sacrifices - if we need to sacrifice a little off the bottom line now to give our children a better future than they are like to have if we keep Australia tied to antiquated and depleting energy sources and even more ancient ideas - then we should make that sacrifice.

If you and your government can't persuade the people of this country that they have to hurt a little now to avoid hurting a lot later - then you aren't up to the job of leading this country. You govern - you don't lead - you will *never* lead if what I see coming out of Canberra and Brisbane is anything to go by. You are administrators - nothing more. It's within your power to change that though.

Anything that is worth anything requires sacrifice - would you not say the future is worth it?

Letter from Prue Hewett



Web: <http://www.ccwild.com/>

Tuesday 17 December 2103

To: Federal Environment Minister Hon. Greg Hunt

Greg.Hunt.MP@aph.gov.au

Re: Protection of Nature Reserves in Australia

Dear Minister Hunt,

As the owner of a World Heritage Nature Refuge in Queensland, I am fully aware of the inability of government to protect and conserve our national treasures.

Your decision to honour a conservation agreement with Bimblebox Nature Refuge would be the beginning of Australia's acknowledgement that the environment cannot be sold to the highest bidder. With this recognition will come greater wealth in the form of cost effective conservation by the people who live on the land. Just take a look at Australia's conservation record. All of our environment budget that is spent on "National Parks" is actually contributing to land that has had its human population removed and is stocked with feral pigs - 24 million feral pigs in Australia outnumber people and out-pollute the environment.

If you compare the cost-effectiveness of land that is conserved by private landholders, at no cost to the public purse, then you will realise that you must protect Nature Refuges, and if the people who own the land are willing to shoulder the

responsibilities and costs, then they must be supported and protected from invasion of damaging forces. This is the role of government.

My Conservation Agreement with Queensland Government has been a lost cause, because Queensland's environmental policies do not support conservation, they do not support private landholders and they undermine legitimate conservation.

While Government today continues to pay bureaucracies that are preventing effective conservation and adding to our national debt, environmental problems will continue to escalate.

Please, start the change now to support the people who are responsible for conservation. Become a government of which we can be proud.

First step - **"Save Bimblebox from coal mining!"**

Second Step - Find out why World Heritage protected freehold land has had its land valuation increased by 630% because it is growing and protecting rainforest as required, instead of chopping it down.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. L. Hewett." The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Prue Hewett

Landholder Lot 52 SR537

Daintree Rainforest Pty Ltd

Letter from Dr Joan Vickers

Dear Hon. Greg Hunt MP,

I write out of concern for Bimblebox Nature Refuge. The construction of a giant coal mine over a Nature Reserve is so abhorrent to so many Australians that Bimblebox could become the Franklin Dam of this generation. Bimblebox is one of the most important remaining remnants for the native flora and fauna of the area.

I also have deep concerns about approval for such a large coal mine that will add significantly to the world's CO2 emissions in the last decade in which we have the opportunity to reduce those emissions to safe levels.

Federal approval should be rejected on the intended destruction of habitat for the Black-throated Finch (Southern). The intended surface clearance footprint (about half of Bimblebox) and underground mine area (the other half) destroy or adversely affect habitat for this endangered species. Almost all of Bimblebox is mapped as Black-throated Finch preferred habitat or buffer. The recent Black-throated Finch observation at Bimblebox Nature Refuge is only about 100 km from recent central Queensland records (Recovery Plan, 2007) and comprises an important southern limit.

The underground mine area encompasses not only a large part of Bimblebox Nature Refuge, but also most of the Cavendish Area to the southwest, which is also Black-throated Finch Preferred Habitat. These are the two last remaining large refuges for native vegetation of this part of Queensland. Underground mining will cause subsidence and lowering of the water table for both of these areas, which will have a profoundly adverse effect on their ecology.

Despite the proponent's statement to the contrary, this mine would have a significant impact on this endangered species because there is a real chance or possibility that it will adversely affect habitat critical to the survival of a species, and interfere with the recovery of the species.

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW THIS MINE TO GO AHEAD. PLEASE DO NOT APPROVE THE DESTRUCTION OF BIMBLEBOX NATURE RESERVE.

Regards,
Dr Joan Vickers

Abridged letter from Dr Craig Allen

Dear Environment Minister Hunt,

I am a US citizen, a research scientist who has worked at Bimblebox Nature Refuge in both 2010 and 2012, and I know first-hand the ecological AND societal importance of Bimblebox. This NR refuge protects one of the best and last high-quality habitat fragments left in that region, with high biodiversity values. It also represents an important and unique bottom-up societal effort by a collaboration between ranching families and researchers to develop sustainable practices for livestock grazing that also sustain the native biodiversity of this ecoregion, with over 10 years of experimentation and data collection to date. I personally know the landowners (particularly Ian and Paola), and multiple scientists who work on long-term vegetation studies there at Bimblebox - these people have put their hearts and souls into the mission of Bimblebox as a Nature Reserve. To develop an environmentally and socially sustainable future, this region needs more such dedicated efforts by progressive citizens, not the destruction of one of the few examples that exists, and the loss of all that good-faith work there.

And certainly to destroy such a Nature Reserve as Bimblebox, with a legally binding "perpetual conservation covenant", would make a mockery out of the "protections" of Australia's National Reserve System, and would set a very dangerous precedent.

Further, I submit that to destroy a now-rare place like Bimblebox for "another" coal mine surely would be viewed as a misguided short-sighted decision in the near future. Particularly given the significant damages that burning that coal certainly would contribute to globally (climate change, ocean acidification), nationally (more drought extremes and degradation of the Great Barrier Reef), and of course regionally (gutting large areas of landscape and squandering precious groundwater supplies). While I am writing to you as a private citizen, my perspectives are strongly influenced by my experiences and understanding as a scientist conducting research on the effects of climate variability and change on forests around the world (e.g., see attached articles) -- our best current scientific understanding is that (given current fossil-fuel emission scenarios) projected global climate changes (particularly warming) even during this century likely will force whole-sale reorganization of vegetation patterns globally, with massive disruptions of human societies likely as well. As such impacts become ever-clearer to global human societies the switch away from coal will emerge rapidly and this period of "mine it-burn it- as fast as possible" will be seen as a period of irresponsible short-run-obsessed misdirection, squandering the opportunities since ca. 1990 to use our prosperity/knowledge/ingenuity to transition to more sustainable energy pathways. The attached recent article by Hansen et al. illustrates clearly how we already know enough to see that most of the world's known fossil fuel reserves need to remain unexploited to avoid dangerous climate disruption in coming decades.

The Bimblebox Nature Refuge, and it's dedicated human supporters, are counting on you to do your job as Environment Minister, and protect Australia's environment from a proposed coal mine that clearly would have enormous irretrievable environmental

impacts associated with it. Please do not approve the China First coal mining project, and the associated destruction of Bimblebox Nature Reserve. The world is watching, you have an opportunity to do the right thing and uphold protection of Australia's natural environment, and human quality of life.

Sincerely,

Craig D. Allen, Ph.D.
Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA

Letter from Kim Wirth

The Hon Greg Hunt
Minister for the Environment

Tuesday, 17 December 2013

Re: Waratah Coal's proposed China First coal project in the Galilee Basin

Dear Mr Hunt,

I am a normal citizen but perhaps with the advantage of being an experienced professional aviator. I have observed most of Australia from the air at one time or another and over many years. I have seen the changes and can't have helped but see the impact of man on the environment. More often than not in a very destructive and detrimental way. Coal extraction is one I have observed for over twenty years. From minor appearing scars on the ground to now "mini grand canyon" like holes extending through Central Queensland. The Hunter Valley is nothing short of amazing in quite a disgusting display of environmental destruction. That is only the above ground part. Literally cubic miles of carbon extraction and conversion to atmospheric carbon or gas.

Globally and long term these vast exploitations of environment and extractions of huge amounts of stored natural carbon to be ultimately exhausted in to an atmosphere of finite volume simply defies logic.

The amount of energy wasted worldwide at the moment is ridiculous. One indicator is in the form of light emitted that is man made at night. Photographs at night from satellites or high flying aircraft proudly show off the light from man (cities towns etc). I can also see the glow of Brisbane for example from up to 400 kilometres away on a clear night. The energy required for that light shines from a city where the people are mostly asleep. This happens world wide. So the energy produced largely from burning coal and exhausting it into the atmosphere is also largely wasted on sleeping people just as one example. Perhaps energy needs and production for humanity should just be a bit more efficient across the board! That includes energy production by more environmentally friendly means!

The land and aquifers destroyed by this coal extraction destroys habitat and land not only required for flora and fauna but land able to sustainably produce food indefinitely into the future for humans. Short term gain of mining, which is also doubtful anyway, is really shooting ourselves in the foot in the long term. We will be lambasted by future generations for this incredible lack of foresight and planning.

The fact that under our system of government and elections, Tony Abbott and the Liberals gained seats sufficient to hold power in Government was a not a blanket clearance to do as you will with the country and environment. On the issue of environment and sustainable development my very good understanding is that Australians want the condition of the environment Australia and world wide taken into serious consideration and given a high priority. They are rightly highly concerned. Tony Abbott's self proclaimed mandate to seemingly now do as he pleases is incorrect.

I re-iterate below, the points put forward by Paola Cassoni of Bimblebox nature reserve in Central Queensland. I urge you to seriously consider the viability and sense in turning Central Queensland into virtually one huge coal mine, potentially destroying essential underground aquifers and on ground watersheds such as the Belyando. The effect on the world eco balance of carbon is real and serious. The local effect on Australian environment and our viability as a food producer is serious. Australia's credibility as an international partner in looking after the planet will be shot.

"Save Bimblebox from coal mining!"

- Bimblebox is an important private protected area in Queensland's Desert Uplands that was saved from tree clearing by concerned families. It forms part of Australia's National Reserve System and is covered by a perpetual conservation covenant. It is a valuable conservation area that should not be mined!
- The destruction of Bimblebox by mining would represent the most significant impact experienced to date on a nature refuge. A dangerous precedent that should not be set!
- Waratah Coal has proposed 'offsetting' Bimblebox. However, these 'offset' areas are areas of bushland that already exist, so it would only result in a net loss of biodiversity in Queensland!
- Waratah Coal wants to mine and export 40 million tonnes of coal every year from this proposed mine. That equates to around 95 million tonnes of CO₂ – about the annual total from the nation of Greece. This coal should be kept in the ground in the interests of a safe climate!
- If the mine goes ahead it would have significant impacts on groundwater – a vital resource in the region and for the local grazing industry. Australia cannot afford to sacrifice its precious groundwater!
- The Galilee Coal Project is only one of up to ten proposed in the Galilee Basin. The cumulative impacts on land, water, communities and the global climate are enormous. These cumulative costs need to be accounted for before any more mines are approved!

Please take my letter very seriously. I am but one person who has taken the time and trouble to write because I care. There are many others who don't write but they do complain, grumble and worry about the state of the care for environment.

The bottom line and thing to remember is:

We live on this planet, we don't own it. The Earth provides for all life that live on here but we must also do our housekeeping and look after it as our home. So far we are only using and destroying it in an unintelligent and selfish way regardless of outcome for ourselves and the long term future for humanity let alone any other equally deserving forms of life on the planet.

Yours Sincerely,
Kim Wirth