



HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

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The Hon Andrew McNamara
Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation
PO Box 15155
City East QLD 4002

26 February 2009

Dear Minister,

Re: Coal mining in the Bimblebox Nature Refuge

Humane Society International (HSI) is concerned at the prevalence of exploratory drilling for coal that is underway in the Bimblebox Nature Refuge in the Desert Uplands of central-west Queensland. This 8000 hectare refuge exists in a bio-region that has undergone extensive land clearing for broad-acre grazing, and contributes significantly to the less than 3% of land area protected in conservation reserves.

The Bimblebox Nature Refuge was purchased with the express purpose of securing the protection of the habitat from land clearing. It was partly funded by the Commonwealth Natural Reserve System program in 2001, and a Nature Refuge Agreement was signed with the Queensland Government in 2003. Yet despite these initiatives, coal mining interests are compromising the integrity of the refuge, and there is no longer any evident protection now that coal has been discovered beneath the soil.

For more than a year, mining company Waratah Coal has been conducting exploratory drilling across the refuge area which has already resulted in considerable habitat destruction. These activities have seen the proliferation of more than 20 drilling sites, oil spills, damage to existing roads and the propagation of new ones. The company is now proposing the development of a large open-cut mine and a new rail line to connect it to an east-coast port, from where the coal can be exported. Despite the rejection of the port proposal by the Federal Environment Minister owing to the unacceptable impact it would have on the pristine Shoalwater Bay, the company has not altered its plans for the mine, and we understand the project has received the Queensland Premier's endorsement.

The Bimblebox Nature Refuge is located in one of the country's few nationally recognised biodiversity *hotspots*, Einasleigh and Desert Uplands, an area with a highly diverse assemblage of locally endemic species that are only rarely found elsewhere. HSI has recently undertaken an analysis of Australia's landscapes to identify Natural Heritage priorities beyond the National Reserve System. As such, we have identified Einasleigh and the Desert Uplands as a priority area of outstanding biodiversity value that ought to be comprehensively assessed for listing as National Heritage under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*. A copy of this Special Bulletin is attached for your information.

If this open-cut mining proposal is allowed to proceed, it will lead to the certain large scale

destruction of this already sensitive area's faunal and floral biodiversity, and the serious disruption of the underground water tables in the district. We therefore urge your government to intervene and honour the State Nature Refuge Agreement, which pledges to protect the Bimblebox Nature Refuge in perpetuity, by stopping the progression of mining activities within this sensitive ecosystem.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Kennedy
Director

Cc:

The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP
Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts

The Hon Anna Bligh
Premier

The Hon Craig Wallace
Minister for Natural Resources and Water

The Hon Timothy Mulherin
Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries