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Media Release from Kingaroy Concerned Citizens Group (KCCG)

Kingaroy Confronts New Mine Threat



Food or Bauxite: Local landholder Alan Sommerfeld walks his peanut and corn rows considered not strategic cropping land but rather a possible bauxite mine. (permission granted for photo to be used in news related to this story)

Rural landholders surrounding Kingaroy are facing another threat soon after celebrating the end of Cougar Energy's failed UCG trial.

Several landholders have been approached by Volcan Holdings seeking access to prime red soil land to begin exploration for volcanic bauxite. They have been told that the State Government has recently approved Exploration Permits for virtually the entire red soil farmlands of the South Burnett.

Many farmers were pinning their hopes on the Government's Strategic Cropping Land (SCL) as a means of protecting their cropping land against short term mining and energy interests.

However, they were dismayed to learn that the two defining feature of their fertile land are the two aspects that appear to rule them ineligible for SCL status, and the protection that goes with it.

Strategic Cropping Land guidelines recently released by DERM states that soil must not have an acidic ph level of less than 5, and that the inclination of the farm paddock must not exceed 5%. It would appear that many of the fertile red volcanic soils of the South Burnett fall outside one or both of these criteria.

Although they would normally welcome co-ordination between Government Departments, the co-incidence of many red soils being ruled out of SCL status by the Department of Environment and Resource Management, and at the same time having the Department of Mines and Energy granting exploration permits for volcanic bauxite on these same soil types is too much for some.

Kingaroy Concerned Citizens Group secretary John Dalton said that some group members see it as a co-ordinated event.

“The State Government grants permits to explore for volcanic bauxite one month, and then rules out SCL protection of the same soil type the next. It is difficult not to be cynical. Local landholders are on the lookout for the thin edge of the wedge when it comes to this sort of development.” he said.

“We told both Ministers Kate Jones and Stephen Robinson during the Cougar fiasco that if they want cooperation from local communities, they have to spend time informing and consulting locally. They can’t just stamp an approval in Brisbane, trust the company to do the right thing informing the locals, and expect anything other than suspicion or hostility.”

“We will also be contacting both Government Departments to remind them of their undertakings given during the Cougar Energy events to get it right and not hide behind the company doing the exploration. The Government grants the permits, so they have some obligation to justify it as a good idea” Mr Dalton said.

“Its information before exploration” he said.

KCCG President Gary Tessman said that it looks like our local group of concerned citizens may be about to have an influx members from the full length of the South Burnett, and not just surrounding the Cougar Energy site at Coolabunia.

“I think this will be a case of “Lock the Gate and negotiate” he added. “We expect that the Government and Volcan to feed us the line that this is just exploration, and not full blown mining. However, there is no way that a Government that grants a permit to explore won’t also approve full mining if it turns out that deposits are viable.”

The group is currently planning a series of meetings to inform and support the many farmers who will be directly affected by these events. The first one is planned for 7-00pm Wednesday 11th May 2011 at the Kingaroy RSL.

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