



The Uniting Church in Australia  
Clermont Congregation  
PO Box 99  
Clermont, 4721

## **An open letter from the Clermont Congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia**

**March 25, 2014**

We write because we believe a great injustice is about to be done in the state of Queensland.

It has been our privilege to stand beside the farmers of our region for the last four years, in particular through contact with our minister, Rev Dr David Ferguson. These people are not anti-development, but have lobbied successive governments to negotiate with them to ensure that the proposed railway between the Galilee Basin and the coast takes into account the needs of their businesses and does not unnecessarily disrupt the hydrology of the area, flooding their properties every wet season.

These farmers have lobbied government and have been through the heartbreak of broken promises. They have worked through the system and they have never broken the law or descended into abuse even though the system places them at a significant disadvantage with restricted time to respond to lengthy and technical documents and assumes that an engineer with a spreadsheet knows more about the hydrology of an area than people who have worked the land for generations.

Sadly, this is still too much scrutiny for billionaires, multinationals and our state government to allow. These people fighting for their rights cause uncertainty for financiers and thus it has been proposed to establish the "Galilee Basin State Development Area."

This act of regulation would essentially set the area apart for the specific purpose of transporting coal from the proposed Galilee Basin mines to the coast with all other land uses allowed only if they do not affect the primary purpose of the land. It removes planning rights from local government and delivers it to the state. It removes any sense of negotiation between locals and developers as plans are negotiated between the developers and the government with the local land users only being compensated after work on their land commences.

Can you imagine that? The land that you have worked for a purpose beneficial to your family, your community and the state is now arbitrarily set apart for another purpose.

Of course we are all familiar with easements and other needs for the public good to override individual rights and this regulation has been applied in other areas. What makes this proposal unique is the fact that the proposed State Development Area is 30 km wide and 500 km long. It covers 18 000 km<sup>2</sup>, almost 1% of the surface area of our state. It encloses 100 farms and two urban areas. It encloses significant areas of prime agricultural land and profitable horticultural land.

We say again, there are other ways to achieve the proposed railway development. Such projects already have significant legal advantages over local landholders under other regulations.

The people we live alongside with are not anti-development, but they are against development at all costs. They actually hoped that at one stage they would be able to use the railway to open up new opportunities in their area.

Extinguishing the legal and property rights of all other producers over such a broad swath of the state is going too far. For the sake of local people and the people of this great state of Queensland, we appeal to the government to stop this unjust and sweeping action.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "D. Ferguson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Rev Dr David Ferguson

Minister of the Word

On behalf of The Uniting Church in Australia Clermont Congregation

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