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## **Bickham Begins Preliminary EIS Work**

The Bickham Coal Company today announced it had begun preliminary work for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for potential mining of its coal deposit south of Murrurundi in the Hunter Valley.

Bickham Director David Foster said the company was taking the unusual step of announcing the commencement of EIS scoping and work because of its commitment to open and honest dealing with the local community.

"It's better that we tell the community what's happening rather than have the locals hearing about it second or third hand," Mr Foster said.

"We aim to keep the community informed of every step we take for this project and we have advised the Bickham Community Consultative Committee chairman of our decision to start preliminary work on the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement."

The Consultative Committee was established as part of approval conditions for the extraction of a bulk coal sample at Bickham.

Under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act a comprehensive EIS must be prepared as part of the application for development of a mine.

Mr Foster emphasised that preparation of an EIS does not imply that full - scale mining was inevitable.

"We are still a long way from taking a final decision as to whether or not we make a formal application to the State Government," he said. "Apart from our own feasibility studies we need a favourable response from potential customers following their tests on the 25,000 tonne sample we will be providing.

“All these things are critical for the EIS to proceed to completion,” he said.

“If we do go ahead, however, we want to base the application on the most extensive and comprehensive range of data on environmental, flora and fauna, heritage, river and ground water, landform and other issues collected for an EIS.

“A lot of data has already been collected for the Review of Environmental Factors, which was part of the bulk sample approval, and this will provide an invaluable range of base line data for an EIS.

“We will now be able to incorporate data collected during the bulk sample extraction, which will enhance the scope and merit of any EIS.”

Mr Foster said experienced and respected consultants had been engaged to prepare EIS-related data and reports and discussions were soon to be undertaken with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR) on the scope and requirements of the EIS. If an EIS is lodged with the State Government all the regulatory and community reviews would follow.

“The community consultation processes we’ve put in place will continue during the bulk sample extraction and through the whole preparation period of the EIS,” he said. “We’ve got nothing to hide and we want the community involved in every aspect of this project.”

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