



Media Release

"Stick to the Facts"

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The proponent of an open-cut coal mine in the Upper Hunter has urged government and the community to stick to the facts as they respond to the Draft Strategic Assessment Report released last week.

Bickham Coal Project Manager John Richards says the Report makes various assumptions which are not based on fact, and one of its main recommendations will not deliver demonstrable benefits for the community, the industry or the environment.

John Richards said Bickham Coal Company had recognised the importance of water management from the start of the project and has undertaken detailed study of salinity and any possible connection between the Pages River and groundwater.

"The body of hard scientific knowledge in relation to these issues - gathered before, during and after the extraction of a bulk coal sample - is now far greater as a result of these studies."

"Bickham Coal is confident that both the data collected, and the deductions drawn from that data, will stand up to the extensive scrutiny of any EIS process and a Commission of Inquiry. The company is of the view that the same standards of scrutiny should be applied to the Draft Strategic Report, particularly in relation to groundwater and salinity."

As an example Richards referred to the attempt in the Draft Report to model the salinity impact of a new mine in the Upper Hunter using data from seven mines in the Lower Hunter.

"It's like using temperature data from Cairns to predict weather in Hobart! It would have been far more relevant to use information from similar low salinity areas like Ulan or Lithgow."

The Draft Report also raises the crucial question - which has been the focus of study by Bickham Coal from 2002 - of whether the Pages River and groundwater are directly connected.

The Draft Report says a "preliminary review" of groundwater levels suggests the river and groundwater fluctuate in a similar fashion and, therefore, must be connected.

John Richards says this is a narrow and flawed interpretation of the facts.

"Bickham Coal has carried out a number of investigations, including detailed water chemistry. All studies present abundant evidence that the Pages River and groundwater are NOT linked."

Richards also criticised the Draft Report recommendation to create a two-step approval process for mining projects.

"This recommendation has no demonstrable benefit to the community, the proponent or the environment. The outcomes outlined in the Draft Report can be achieved by including the obligation to provide a Water Resource Assessment and Water Management Plan in the EIS requirements set down by the Director-General of DIPNR. The studies would then be undertaken concurrently with the EIS."

John Richards says the environmental outcomes would be exactly the same, without the lengthy delay and uncertainty for both community and proponent.

ENDS

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