

Bickham Coal to submit water study

BICKHAM Coal Company, which plans to develop an open cut mine near the Pages River at Murrurundi, announced on Tuesday that it was going to lodge its key water study with the NSW Department of Planning this week.

Bickham Coal is the first mining company that has been required to do a water analysis before the mine could be considered for comprehensive assessment.

Bickham Coal director John Richards said the report was in the hands of the Department, and he anticipated that the material would be exhibited publicly in the near future.

Bickham Coal said multiple government stakeholders including the Department of Environment and Climate Change, the Department of Water and Energy and Upper Hunter Shire Council have been briefed on the water study.

But the community is yet to see it and because the mine would be built at the mouth of the Upper Hunter catchment the project has met with opposition from community groups, including the Upper

Hunter Water Keepers Alliance who want to ensure the waters of the Pages River are not contaminated.

Upper Hunter Water Keepers Alliance president and Gundy farmer Patrice Newell said she would not be satisfied until she has read the water report which the alliance has been waiting to see for three years.

"Let's hope the Department of Planning accepts this second additional water report and releases it to the community to look at," Ms Newell said.

Although the community is yet to see the report Bickham Coal appears confident with the water analysis which it said was finalised by some of Australia's leading water and environmental experts.

The press release issued by Bickham Coal Company on Tuesday said the Water Resource Assessment and Draft Water Management Plan show that the 36 million tonne mine near Murrurundi would have negligible impacts on local waterways.

Bickham Coal said the report was built

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on exhaustive monitoring, modelling, technical analyses and assessments that have been conducted since 2002.

"You would struggle to find a mining project anywhere in Australia that has been as thoroughly scrutinised and analysed as the Bickham proposal," Mr Richards said.

A summary of the water report that was released in the press release said the study showed that at no stage in the 25-year life of the mine – or after completion of mining –

that water would flow from the Pages River to the mine and that the mine would affect Pages River stream base flows by less than 0.2 per cent on average.

The report also said the mine would affect water flows to the Kingdon Ponds by less than 0.25 per cent on average and there would be negligible

effects on the Cameron's Gorge ecosystem further downstream.

To ensure that the long-term health of the Pages River is beyond doubt, Bickham Coal would commit to adding supplementary base flows from ground water bores to replace the minor river water losses.

Some small post-mining river water losses would be mitigated by Bickham relinquishing part of its water licence.

A comprehensive, independent and

ongoing monitoring program with regular and stringent reviews is proposed to keep track of all water issues.

Aquaterra Senior Hydrogeologist and Bickham consultant Peter Dundon agreed that the level of environmental assessment ahead of formal government assessment was extensive and said Aquaterra believe the facts show that the proposed mine could go ahead without causing Environmental impacts of consequence.

However, Ms Newell said linking the river with the ground water was a contentious issue.

Ms Newell said Bickham would be wrong to think that after nine years of discussions that the alliance would be happy that Bickham would pump water out of the aquifer.

Mr Richards said if the mine were to go ahead, more than 100 local jobs would be up for offer on a project that could generate more than three billion dollars in export revenue.

"Is it worth the risk of putting an open cut coal mine at the very mouth of the Upper Hunter water catchment?" Ms Newell said.