

Residents rally for coal mine

EIGHTY people attended a rally in support of the Bickham Coal Mine last Thursday afternoon.

Supporters came from different towns and had different reasons for wanting the mine to go ahead but jobs and the future of Murrurundi were common issues.

Simon Ford from the Murrurundi Motel said the rally was the first to be held in support of the proposed mine and the response had been positive.

"I've heard nothing but bad publicity but you can see today how many people are interested," Mr Ford said.

Mr Ford said Murrurundi was a great town for families with young children and for retirees, but he feared for the town's prosperity.

"People are starting to feel unstable and are starting to move away," he said.

"Why has Rosedale subdivision been sitting so long with no house on it? I'll tell you why, the town needs jobs."

Mr Ford said he has owned the Murrurundi Motel for eight years and since then he has seen the closure of a woodwork shop, stockfeeds, two real estate agencies, a pet shop, a craft shop, a

veterinary clinic, butcher, health food shop, clothing shop, second handwares store, a saddlery, hairdresser, Pages River Café, three service stations, an earth moving business, two plumbers, a fish shed, and a horse riding school and the credit union has been downgraded to an agency. The doctors surgery is also closing and last Friday Bridgeway Rural Supplies closed down.

"In today's economic climate it is crucial to have heavy industry" he said.

"The timing for this area could not be better and would draw people back to the local area."

Laurie Ninness owns an earth moving business at Murrurundi but said he had to scale it down and sell some of his unused equipment.

"There is not enough work here," he said.

Bob Standen said his children are leaving the area because of the lack of employment opportunities.

"The town cannot survive on pensioners and the unemployed," he said.

"I am opposed to some mines because of where they are, but not this mine," he said.

Another supporter Doug

Adams said he had worked for Bickham for six years.

"Those fellows will do their best to look after everything," he said.

Brothers Anthony and Brian Field both know the land where the proposed mine would be located very well, they were born and grew up on the property.

"It is a beautiful place, but this town is dying," Anthony said.

Both brothers worked in different industries after they left Bickham but the businesses shut and now they both work in the mining industry. Brian said he travels 200km to and from work each day and Anthony said when his commute is included his working days were 15 hours long.

"I've been in the mining industry for three years now and it has opened up opportunities," Anthony said.

Brian Field now lives at Blandford but spent 27 years at Bickham.

"Bickham has got to go ahead; we cannot survive on coffee shops and art galleries,"

"It's just going down hill," Brian Field said.



GO BICKHAM: Amber Mason, Mick Day, Ron Ferguson, Peter Redman, Jason Chappel, Andrew Dykes, Peter Cooper, Bradley Poole, Toby Field and Mark Brown.