

## Bickham Coal responds

I REFER to some recent submissions to the *Scone Advocate* in relation to the proposed Bickham Coal Mine near Murrurundi.

Bickham understands that there will always be some vocal opposition to coal mine projects in the Hunter Valley (Upper and Lower).

However, it is important that the pros and cons of each proposal are looked at in a holistic manner and not swayed by simplistic rhetoric and misleading generalisations.

All statements should be backed up by facts, preferably with input from qualified and seasoned water experts who know what they are talking about.

It is misleading to simply say that the Pages River will take between 70 and 100 years to return to normal without examining this in context.

The effects our water experts are talking about are miniscule to say the least.

For example, small quantities of groundwater currently seep into the Pages River from coal measures on the proposed mine site, causing the stream flow near the site to increase slightly.

The small flow increases cannot be detected visually, and can only be measured by careful monitoring.

As the mine develops some of these seeps will ease, resulting in slightly smaller flow increases for a period during and after completion of mining.

But there will at all times during and after mining be a continuing increase in stream flow as the Pages River flows past the site.

The facts show that these are negligible effects can only be

detected with sensitive water flow testing equipment.

There has been commentary on various changes to the proposed mine. These are concessions we have very deliberately made to put beyond doubt any impacts the mine might have on local waterways.

We have reduced the size of the mine by 25 percent, shifted the boundaries back from waterways, opted to back-fill the current bulk sample pit and moved the overburden dump.

This is because we have listened to community concerns about perceived impacts on waterways and demonstrated flexibility to put those concerns to rest.

The fact that this matter has been in play for so many years is testimony to our persistence in showing that we want to get it right.

We have spared absolutely no expense with our water studies, and the highly regarded water experts we have engaged are telling what they have been telling us for a long time – there is nothing to worry about in terms of local waterways.

It is in our and everyone else's interests to have straight, hard factual information... not speculation.

Everyone can be assured that we would not have held on for this long if the experts were ever telling us something different.

It would be difficult to find a mining project anywhere else in Australia that has been subjected to as much scrutiny as the Bickham project, and we welcome that.

The Bickham site is an area that has been identified for open cut mining by the NSW Government, subject to

exhaustive water studies being completed.

It presents a massive economic opportunity in a part of the Hunter where such opportunities are badly needed.

300 new jobs (100 direct and 200 indirect) are on offer, along with \$20 million a year in local revenue.

These are lifelines to townships such as Murrurundi, Blandford and Wingen.

Murrurundi is at risk of losing vital health and education services, which is why so many locals want the opportunity we are offering.

We are constantly fielding calls from locals enquiring about employment opportunities.

They might not be as vocal as some of our opponents, but there are in fact a lot of people in those towns who want a green light for this project.

What's important is that a rigorous planning process is followed.

Bickham is grateful that the water studies are on exhibition and being referred to an independent government-appointed panel for transparent and balanced scrutiny.

These are experts with no agenda. You cannot be fairer than that.

We can all agree that the environment needs to be protected.

If the facts show that this very well considered project can co-exist with the environment and other industries, it should proceed to full merit-based assessment by the NSW Government as soon as possible.

**John Richards**  
Director, Bickham Coal  
Company