

Rallying for Bickham Coal

A GROUP of Murrurundi and Blandford residents and business owners will stage a support rally for the proposed Bickham Coal Mine today.

Fed up with staying silent when opposition to the mine can be loudly heard throughout the Upper Hunter, those attending the rally at Dooley's car park at midday will call for the mine to go ahead.

Since Bickham Coal released its water report for public scrutiny last month, debate has raged among farmers, conservationists and concerned residents as to whether the proposed open cut mine could pollute or reduce the water flows of nearby water courses which are used by landholders both upstream and downstream.

However, now residents at Blandford and Murrurundi are making themselves heard and are saying they need the mine to provide jobs in the area.

Peter Millgate will be one of those supporting the mine at the rally and said he knew of a lot of people who wanted the mine to proceed.

"The town is dying, there are no jobs and there is no industry in Murrurundi," Mr Millgate said.

"It is all right for those people who sold up in Sydney and came here and bought cheaper houses, they just don't want something in their backyards," he said.

Kanchan Ranadive from Lets Eat Café

and Maureen Bowd from Dooley's Store have both said they have been having trouble with their businesses.

Mrs Ranadive said because there are few jobs people have left town so now she is finding it hard to find staff and Mrs Bowd said she has had to cut back staff hours because there has been fewer customers.

Simon Ford from Murrurundi Motel also supports the mine and said the town is at a crossroads. The community is losing its only doctor and several businesses have closed and there is talk that a teacher will be leaving the school.

Mr Ford said if things did not improve soon Murrurundi would become a ghost town.

"Every country town needs heavy industry to support it," he said.

"We are sick of seeing things close down."

Mr Ford said even the motel was suffering from the closure of other businesses.

"We used to have a lot of workers stop in town, now they don't stop because there is no food places here," he said.

"The more jobs you can get going the more young families will move into town and that will have a flow on effect," he said.

Mr Ford said he expected at least 50 people to attend the protest.