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MEDIA RELEASE

BICKHAM AND UPPER HUNTER RESIDENTS MAKE A CASE TO NSW PLANNING MINISTER

Bickham Coal Company and a delegation of Upper Hunter community and business identities travelled to Sydney yesterday to meet NSW Planning Minister Tony Kelly and emphasise the benefits of the proposed Bickham mine.

The delegation presented the Minister with a survey of local businesses from Murrurundi - and additional feedback from businesses in Blandford and Wingen - indicating strong support for the mine.

Twenty five businesses were in favour of the mine, representing more than 80 percent of businesses surveyed in the Upper Hunter towns.

Murrurundi Railway Hotel owner John Coates said locals were becoming more vocal in support of the mine, given the decline of economic opportunities in the Upper Hunter.

“On behalf of a majority of the local community we wanted to let the Minister know that there is actually solid support for the Bickham proposal,” Mr Coates said.

“We are talking about a strong cross-section of large and small businesses that have registered support.

“You only have to spend a few minutes talking to people in local Hotels and you will quickly learn that a majority of local people want the mine to proceed.

“People talk about how the mining industry has lifted towns such as Denman - if it can work there it can work for struggling Upper Hunter towns.”

Murrurundi Aroma’s cafe owner Peter Milgate reinforced that many locals were depending on Bickham going ahead.

“There used to be a dozen food outlets in Murrurundi, now there are only half that. There used to be four service stations, now there’s only one. And there are no major banks left at all.

“A majority of people are praying for good economic opportunities. We don’t want to lose out the same major heavy industry opportunities enjoyed by people in the lower Hunter Valley.”

Long-term Murrurundi resident and former local Ambulance Officer Bob Standen urged the Minister to consider the rare economic boost the mine could deliver.

“We’ve had countless shops and businesses closing in recent years and it would be tragic to see this job creating opportunity lost,” Mr Standen said.

“It’s a shame to see young people forced to move away from the Upper Hunter to find work and training opportunities.

“Most people just want Bickham to be given a fair go without all the distracting and nonsensical claims coming from the sideline.

“Mines and horse studs have existed in the Hunter for three decades and both have grown in that time, so there’s no reason why that can’t continue if the Bickham proposal proceeds.”

Aquaterra Hydrogeologist and Bickham Water Consultant Peter Dundon reinforced that in 40 years of providing expert water advice, he had never participated in a study as comprehensive as the one completed for Bickham.

“I am quite confident that all due diligence has been put into studying every possible impact the mine might have on local waterways, and that downstream impacts will be absolutely negligible,” Mr Dundon said.

“That’s based on fact and exhaustive scientific study and data.”

Bickham Director John Richards said although it was up to the independent Planning Assessment Commission panel to refer its findings on the Bickham proposal to the Government, it was still important for decisions makers to hear balanced and factual views.

“The chance to give the Minister the facts was very welcome, and the support from locals who wanted to have a say has been heartening,” Mr Richards said.

“We laid it on the table that 386 jobs and \$3.7 billion in revenue are at stake.

“We believe the best way to further tease out the facts is to have the proposal subjected to the rigours of full merit-based assessment, like all other major projects.

“After spending 10 million dollars on preliminary planning processes over eight years, we believe the time has come to put our proposal under a transparent assessment microscope.

“We have every intention of working cooperatively with other industries for the mutual benefit of the Upper Hunter.”

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