

Company says Pages River is safe

DESPITE scepticism among some Upper Hunter residents and lobby groups, Bickham Coal Company is confident its proposed mine would have a negligible impact on local waterways.

On Wednesday, October 21 Bickham Coal placed an updated water study known as the Water Resource Assessment and Draft Water Management Plan on public exhibition. The water study will remain on public exhibition for six weeks and community information sessions will be held in Murrurundi at 6.30pm on Wednesday November 11 and at 7.30am on Thursday, November 12 and in Scone on Thursday, November 12 at 12.30pm and again at 6.30pm.

Bickham Coal director David Foster said he was pleased the report was out on display and said it was probably the most comprehensive report in coal mining ever.

"It was very expensive and we are very pleased the department has given a long display period," he said.

Mr Foster said along with the water study Bickham Coal had also made several other studies such as flora, fauna, noise and dust which would be submitted as part of the final Environmental Assessment to be submitted after the Department of Planning has considered the community response to the water study.

"In addition to the water study and the other studies, basically we have done all the studies for the mine as well," Mr Foster said.

"It is not as though we are starting from day one," he said.

The water study was completed over a seven year period with the main studies starting in

2002 and again from 2004 to 2006.

Aquaterra senior principal hydrologist and Bickham consultant Peter Dundon said although Bickham Coal was requested to submit the water study it was not true the previous reports suggested that there would be a big impact on the local waterways.

"It was more a perception of risk and had more to do with the proximity of the mine to the river," he said.

"It was not as if one was really bad and this one was okay, both are similar," he said.

Mr Dundon said the water study was subjected to independent review throughout and the assessments for the water study have been monitored by Ecowise, an independent organisation.

"They do all the monitoring, and then send all the water samples to an independent laboratory in Sydney," Mr Dundon said.

Two independent experts, Dr Noel Merrick from the Centre for Groundwater at the University of Technology Sydney and Drew Brewsher from Brewsher Consulting have also both double checked the water study.

The Department of Planning will also engage the Planning Assessment Commission to review the study.

Because the water study was conducted over a long period of time, Mr Dundon said it covered a wide range of climatic conditions including drought and normal rainfall.

He said a water study had to be completed before the company could get permission to start mining for the bulk sample in 2002 and 2003 and since then all

the data collected had been added to and is still being added to today.

"Periodically, we have someone visit the site and collect samples which are sent back to the lab," Mr Dundon said.

"We have no recordable impacts on the Pages River or Kingdon Ponds or down stream," he said.

"The study has looked at all aquifers in the region."

Mr Dundon said the water in the coal measures was not part of an aquifer system used by other residents and the alluvial aquifers which irrigation water was drawn from was not near the proposed mine and would not be affected.

Mining engineer Simon Grassby who works for Bloomfield (a 50 per cent shareholder in the mine) and Bickham said Bickham Coal has moved the mine further removing any perceived impact.

Mr Grassby said the top edge of the mine would be more than 150 metres from the Pages riverbank and the pit would now only go below the river level 300 metres from the river.

The crest of the pit would sit more than 10 metres above the maximum flood level and the environment around the mine is made of hard rock so has been considered stable.

The mine would also be 25 per cent smaller than originally planned. Initially Bickham Coal proposed to mine 47 million tonnes of coal but now the company is proposing to mine 36 million tonnes.

Mr Grassby said the mine had also decreased in depth by 50 metres. It will have a total depth

of 250 metres at the maximum point but a large proportion of the pit will be well above the river level.

It will be 400 metres to 500 metres wide at its maximum width.

Mr Dundon said there was a perception that coal mining made ground water more saline but he said the ground water quality in the existing Hunter Valley mining area was already different to that at Bickham which is of similar quality to the water in the Pages River.

"It's one less problem that a typical mine in the Upper

Hunter might experience," he said.

To prevent any contamination into the river, the mine will be further from the river than the bulk sample was and would sit on the right hand side of the bulk sample pit which will be filled in before the first excavation.

Mr Dundon said all water that fell on the mine would be captured and eight settlement dams that were dug to catch any run off from the bulk sample site, would continue to be used.

Mr Dundon said concerns had also been raised about water taking 100 years to reach equity.

However, he said this related to a small amount of water seeping from rocks after rainfall.

Mr Dundon said mining and capturing water run off would stop water seepages reaching the river but no one down stream of the river would be affected.

David Foster said because Bickham is near the existing rail line all the company only had to do was put in a rail loop and an overpass over the highway for all the coal to be transported by rail and none by trucks.

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Bickham Coal Company defends its water study

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BICKHAM Coal already owns all the land and does not need to acquire any more. Mr Foster said Bickham owns 3000 acres overall, the overall size of the mine will be 533 acres but only 239 acres will be open at any one time.

Bickham Coal Company purchased the property in 2001 but got its first exploration licence for the property in 1999.

A previous licence holder did preliminary exploration on the land and in the mid to late 1920s an underground mine was built about 40 metres from the river bank which Mr Foster said was proof that there was little or no connection to the coal seam and the river because if there was a connection they would not have been able to mine the coal as it would have flooded.

To make sure there has been no contamination Bickham continues

to monitor water in the mine.

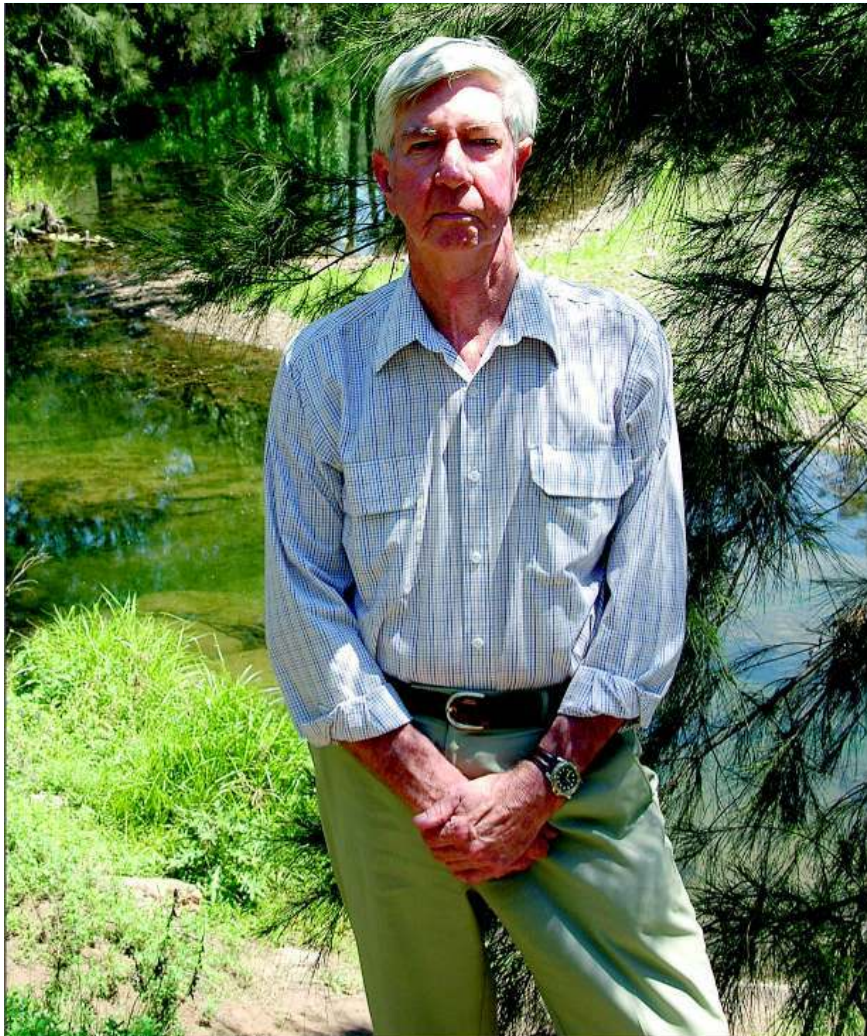
Mr Foster said although there had been strong opposition to the mine he had also spoken to many locals who want the mine to proceed.

He said the mine would create indirect jobs through the construction phase due to the need to build infrastructure and the rail loop and other local businesses such as motels and mechanics would also indirectly benefit from the mine.

"The ration of two indirect jobs to every one direct one is a conservative one," Mr Foster said.

He said he has repeatedly been asked by locals about getting work, he said it was busier when they were digging the bulk sample and had a greater presence in the media but the inquiries have continued during the quieter periods.

"There wouldn't be a fortnight go by where I don't have a telephone inquiry," Mr Foster said.



RIVER SAFE: Bickham Coal director David Foster says the proposed Bickham Coal mine would have a negligible impact on the Pages River or Kingdon Ponds.