



Caroon Coal Action Group Inc.

www.ccag.org.au PO Box 119 Caroon NSW 2343

18 May 2009

UPPER NAMOI WATER STUDY READY TO PROCEED WITH MINISTER'S APPROVAL

After eight months of discussions, a working party established to agree the terms of reference for an independent catchment-wide water study in the Upper Namoi has delivered its recommendations to the NSW Mineral Resources Minister, Ian Macdonald, for approval.

The working group, chaired by former Labor MP Pam Allan, was established by Minister Macdonald last September in recognition that a comprehensive study of the Namoi catchment was necessary to understand the risks to precious water systems posed by several major mining proposals in the area.

Caroon Coal Action Group (CCAG) spokesman Tim Duddy said the working party discussions – which involved BHP Billiton, China's big coal miner Shenhua, and other representatives of the mining lobby – had been extremely difficult.

“It is clear that the big mining interests are very concerned about what an independent study might reveal but once they understood the community will accept nothing less we were able to get on with the job and develop detailed terms of reference,” Mr Duddy said.

“The community did not get everything it wanted but the terms of reference agreed will be workable if everyone is genuine about wanting to protect this iconic region from the risks of future mining.

“One thing that is beyond dispute is that no-one properly understands the complex interconnected network of aquifer systems which make this one of Australia's most productive and precious agricultural areas and link it to the threatened Murray-Darling,” he said.

“The community has made it clear that it will not allow further exploration or mining development anywhere in the licence area until the relevant data clearly showing the water systems is collected, mapped, and the risks of mining the area properly understood.

“It is vital the Minister now swiftly adopt the final recommendations from his working group and commission the water study as a matter of urgency so this important work can begin,” Mr Duddy said.

In 2006, BHP Billiton paid the NSW Government \$100m for a five-year exploration licence at Caroon on the Liverpool Plains while in 2008, Shenhua paid a further \$300m for a neighbouring licence at Watermark.

More than 100 exploration holes have already been drilled deep through the aquifers in the region by BHP Billiton. The community is maintaining a blockade of private properties to stop any further drilling until the independent water study is commissioned.

Contact: Tim Duddy 0427 106267

“We must ensure mining does not destroy our environment, agricultural production, people's livelihoods, health and attachment to the land”