

Mining strategy delayed

Author: MICHELLE HARRIS STATE POLITICS

Date: 08/11/2010

Words: 351

Source: NCH

Publication: Newcastle Herald

Section: News

Page: 21

THE state government is lagging behind its timetable for a new coalmining strategy to address land-use conflicts across NSW as it continues to process plans for multimillion-dollar new and expanded Hunter mines.

A new cabinet subcommittee of five ministers that was announced in July to devise the strategy has yet to set its terms of reference.

The government said initially it intended to outline the strategy by October, and then by "the end of the year".

It now says it "will not be rushed", as the state election looms in March.

The apparent delay has prompted calls from the NSW Farmers Association, the Hunter Valley Water Users Association and the Hunter Thoroughbred Breeders Association for a freeze on plans for new mines and expansions, and exploration licences, until the strategy is done.

The strategy was announced in part as a response to a "cumulative impacts study" of mining on the village of Camberwell, which found dust levels at the village sometimes exceeded guidelines but on average were within limits.

It also followed the government's rejection of the proposed Bickham mine near Scone.

The NSW Minerals Council urged the government to spell out which areas were off-limits for mining.

Planning Minister Tony Kelly chairs the subcommittee, which includes the portfolios of Health, Environment and Climate Change, Treasury, and Industry and Investment.

Since its formation, Paul McLeay has resigned as Mineral Resources Minister after admitting to accessing adult and gambling websites on his parliamentary computer.

The Newcastle Herald was told ministers were unable to agree on the terms and direction of the strategy.

A spokesman for Mr Kelly declined to comment, citing "cabinet matters", but said the government wanted to "get it right" and expected the terms of reference would be endorsed by the end of the year.

The Planning Department was preparing background documents for public consultation later this year.

NSW Farmers Association Mining Taskforce chairwoman Fiona Simson said it was "in the dark" and was not confident that progress was being made, while several controversial mining projects were still being assessed.

The NSW Minerals Council said it supported a strategic plan.