

Mid-Western coal group formed

BY ROBYN MURRAY

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The Mid-Western Community Action Group (MWCAG) will be reactivated as a regional body to voice residents' concerns about the expansion of coal mining, following a public meeting at the Mudgee Soldiers Club on Monday evening.

Around 120 people attended the meeting, convened by the Mudgee Coal Action Group and chaired by former independent State MP and anti-corruption campaigner John Hatton.

Mr Hatton, who is seeking to return to NSW Parliament at the 2011 election, urged the audience to work with action groups in the Hunter Valley and Liverpool Plains, as well as a recently formed national action group.

Mr Hatton said after visiting Running Stream, Charbon, Bylong, Ulan, Moolarben, Wilpinjong and the proposed Cobbora coal mine site, he was "absolutely outraged" about what is happening in the Mid-Western Region and elsewhere in NSW.

"There are not only threats to rural areas but threats to urban areas in terms of the avaricious mining industry, which has no boundaries and no controls," Mr Hatton said, describing the Department of Environment and Climate Change as "a joke".

Mr Hatton said community groups working together, whether fighting high rise in Ku-ring-gai or coal mining in the Liverpool Plains had to muster firepower to win over unpalatable State Government laws.



HANDS UP: Members of the community show their support for forming a regional coal action group at a public meeting at Club Mudgee on Monday night. 161110/033

"You can do it Mudgee, you can do it."

Former Mid Western Action Group president Karl Fletcher told the meeting MWCAG formed to oppose the Stockland development, was dormant following the sale of the Stockland site, but still existed and could be reactivated as a coal action group, using the existing constitution.

Cr Elwyn Lang expressed concern that resurrecting the MWCAG name, with its association with the Stockland controversy, would stir up lingering "bad blood".

He was supported by Cr Russell Holden, who said that the action group should not be seen as anti-council.

"It needs to work closely with council," he said. "The council is passionate about protecting the region."

"The community needs to start working with

council. Everybody needs to work together.

"One group is not going to get results."

But Mr Fletcher said that the MWCAG formed as a single-issue group and was never intended to be a ratepayers' group.

“I don’t believe it should be on anti-council issues,” he said. “It should be on Mid-Western community issues.”

Other speakers at Monday’s meeting were NSW Farmers vice president Fiona Simpson, a CCAG member, and Greg Petty, public officer of the Otford Protection Society, who convened a recent meeting in Broke to form a national group on coal mining and coal seam gas extraction.

Mid-West Regional Coal Action Group member Greg Dollin said about 25 people had volunteered to be part of a steering committee after the meeting.

The group’s would initially focus on the environmental impact study for the Cobbora Mine Project, as well as local issues such as health, water, preservation of agricultural land and transport, he said.

However, the group would also look to work with action groups in the Hunter Valley and the Carroona Coal Action Group (CCAG) on the Liverpool Plains, he said.

“I think John Hatton and Russell Holden have been very successful in getting us together and inspiring us,” he said.