

# Region faces mine ‘explosion’

BY ROBYN MURRAY

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The Mid-Western Region faces an explosion of mining in the next seven years, Mid-Western Regional Council general manager Warwick Bennett told National Party members at a community meeting on Monday afternoon.

NSW National leader Andrew Stoner, Member for Orange Russell Turner, Nationals Deputy Leader in the Legislative Council of NSW and Nationals candidate for Orange Andrew Gee attended the meeting to hear the community's and councillors' concerns about the expansion of mining in the region.

Mr Bennett said that Mid-Western Regional Council was not anti-mining, but was concerned about the balance between mining and the existing community and industries.

Mr Bennett called for local, state and federal governments to work with coal mines and the community to develop a strategic plan for mining in the region.

“This council is on the edge of an explosion of coal mining,” he said.

“The four mines in the region have expanded in the last few years, but the fearful thing is that we have another five mines on the way.”

“We don't know what the cumulative effects of coal mining will be and we don't believe the State Government knows or gives a damn and that is scaring us and scaring our community.

“We don't want to become another Hunter Valley, where [mines] have developed over time without any planning at all.”

Mr Bennett said in addition to the 38 per cent of regional businesses who depended on agriculture, the Mid-Western Region has 40 cellar doors and a \$300 million tourism industry which could be affected by coal mining.

“We need the state and federal government to plan ahead, but don't ignore the community and that is what has occurred,” he said.

“Community consultation only happens after exploration licences have been granted and that is far too late.”

Mr Bennett said issues such as health and housing for the growing population and loss of small communities had not been addressed.

“Ulan township has almost disappeared as a community and we would expect Wollar to disappear as a community in the next year,” he said.

“Heaven knows what will happen to Ilford, Running Stream and Bylong.”

Mr Bennett said a regional strategic plan should include Lithgow, Wellington and Warrumbungle as well as the Mid-Western Regional Council area.

He also called for guidelines for Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPAs) with mining companies, which under present legislation do not address the need for hospitals, schools, doctors and roads in regional area.

“We believe there is too much support for [the mining industry] by the State Government and Department of Planning and there needs to be an emphasis on supporting the community,” he said.

Mr Bennett said it would cost \$21 million just to upgrade Ulan Road to meet OH&S standards for mine traffic.

“We don’t want to be a Hunter Valley,” Mr Bennett said. “We don’t want to make the mistakes of the Hunter and we’re asking for help because we need it.”