

Mid-Western moves to join Hunter group

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Mid-Western Regional Council has voted to join the Hunter Regional Organisation of Councils (HROC).

HROC comprises Muswellbrook, Scone, Singleton, Cessnock, Dungog, Murrurundi, Gloucester, Great Lakes, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Merriwa, Port Stephens and Newcastle City councils.

In his report to council on Wednesday, general manager Warwick Bennett said the councils covered by the HROC were focused on similar issues to the Mid-Western Regional Council, including the rapid growth of coal mining and its effects on employment costs, availability of a skilled workforce, medical services, schooling and community infrastructure.

“Hunter ROC is working with the State Government to establish some firm principles and protocols on how mining companies can be better community partners,” he said.

Mr Bennett said HROC also shared Mid-Western Region’s interest in ensuring tourism and agriculture remain sustainable and continue to grow.

Cr Esme Martens and Cr Percy Thompson opposed the move to join HROC.

Cr Martens said Mid-Western Regional Council would be “swamped” by other councils in HROC.

“Mining-related councils will not support what I feel should be supported,” she said.

“HROC just want the benefits and royalties for themselves and no-one else.”

Cr Thompson argued that Mid-Western Region should be part of the Orana Regional Organisation of Councils (OROC).

“OROC councils have a lot in common [with Mid-Western] like roads and the Cobbora mines,” he said.

“Over this way out only neighbours are Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter.”

But Cr Russell Holden and Cr John Weatherley said it would be to council’s advantage to be part of a group representing councils where mining was taking place.

Cr Holden said it was predicted that Mid-Western Region would produce more coal than the Hunter within a decade.

“Faced with the attitude we have been faced with in the last couple of years, we need all the help we can get and we are not getting it elsewhere,” he said.

Cr Weatherley said there was nothing stopping Mid-Western Regional Council from joining OROC as well as HROC.

“In the immediate time, we should go with HROC,” he said.

Mr Bennett said there was no cost in joining HROC, although there is an \$8000 fee to belong to their procurement division, which includes 55 councils.