

Bylong project won't be rushed, Minister says

Minister for Planning Tony Kelly has rejected Bylong Valley residents' claims that a decision on Cascade Coal's application to mine coal at Mount Penny is being "rushed through".

Cascade Coal has lodged a development application for mine approximate three kilometres west of the Bylong village. According to a notice of application published in Monday's *Mudgee Guardian*, exploration drilling and preliminary mining have shown a coal mine reserve of approximately 101 million tonnes.

The \$400 million project would include an open cut mine producing up to five million tonnes of run of mine coal over 21 years, operating seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

The mine would employ 300 people during construction and 250 during operations.

After Mid-Western Regional Council was given until January 21 to respond to director general's requirements (DGRs), the Bylong Valley Protection Alliance (BVPA) expressed concern that the project was being rushed through ahead of the 2011 state election.

But in a letter to the editor in today's *Mudgee Guardian*, Mr Kelly said the application process would continue well into mid-2011 at the earliest, describing the Bylong Valley Protection Alliance claims as "ridiculous and wrong".

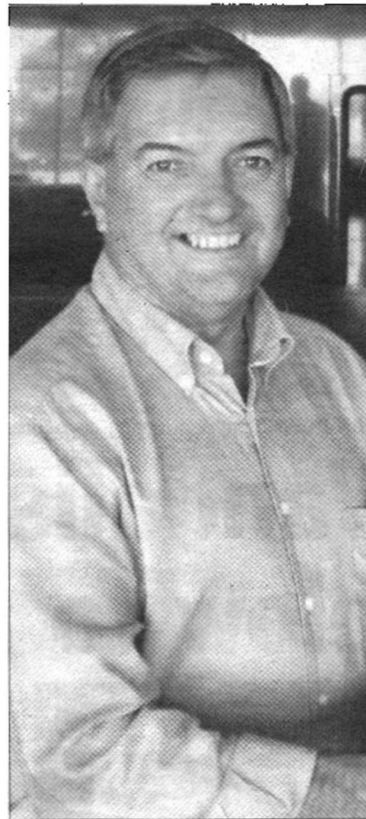
"Development applications for mines are some of the most scrutinised in the NSW Planning system," Mr Kelly said.

Mr Kelly said the public would be informed at every step of the way via the Department of Planning's website.

However, contrary to Monday's advertisement, the Mt Penny Coal Project application had not been posted on the Department of Planning website yesterday.

BVPA interim secretary Craig Shaw said the group welcomed Mr Kelly's assurance but rejected his claims on ABC Radio that the group either did not understand the process or were being misleading.

Mr Shaw said the group's impressions that "it looks like everything is being pushed through" were based on the lack of any public comment until the Australian Stock exchange announcement by White Energy, the



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request for a council response to DGR over Christmas and the advertisement in Monday's *Guardian*.

This gave the impression that the project was well advanced and created anxiety that due process might not be followed, he said.

"I think in those circumstances it's easy enough to see why we would have concerns," he said.

Mr Shaw said in the spirit of ensuring transparency and quality outcomes, the BVPA would push for a commitment from the Department of Planning that there would be an extended period for public scrutiny of any Environmental Assessment produced as part of mining lease application process.

"We're looking for a period of at least six - and preferably eight or 10 - weeks for this to happen over, rather than, say, just 28 days," he said.