

# Miners try to manage the outrage

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Date: 25/10/2010  
Words: 406  
Source: SMH

Publication: Sydney Morning Herald  
Section: News and Features  
Page: 5

MINING companies in NSW are moving to tackle public anger over **mine** expansion in the **Hunter** Valley, acknowledging that they might have a public relations problem.

The Minerals Council of NSW has sent questionnaires to about 120 groups in the region, including environment organisations and the mining companies, to find out what they think about mining and who influences their opinions.

"The Upper **Hunter** mining dialogue is a journey we are embarking on, where we are opening ourselves up for criticism," the council's deputy chief executive, Sue-Ern Tan, said in a statement.

The process was "an industry-wide pilot in response to the specific concerns raised by the community in the Upper **Hunter** and part of the industry's genuine effort to address issues relating to the collective impacts of mining in the region".

Last month the council flew a public relations researcher, Peter Sandman, from the United States to talk with mining industry figures about "outrage management".

Dr Sandman helped create software that includes an "outrage prediction system", designed to process the results of community surveys and give users a sense of the public feeling towards a particular project.

The Minerals Council said Dr Sandman was engaged to help the mining industry understand public sentiment better, but that his methods were not linked to the surveys in the **Hunter** Valley.

Nikki Williams, the head of the council, told a mining conference last month that **miners** had to distinguish between genuine feeling in the community and politically motivated assaults.

"There is mounting criticism of the industry statewide from groups as diverse as academics, the Farmers Association, horse breeders, vigneron, iconic industrialists, GPs, residents, community-based action groups, environmental justice warriors, social justice anti-development fighters like the Greens party, and anti-corporate campaigners ... who are veritable masters of the stunt," Dr Williams said in her speech.

"Their activism has entrenched a trendy if often uninformed cynicism towards our industry."

The Australian Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility has been commissioned to survey people in the **Hunter** Valley.

Bev Smiles, of the Mudgee District Environment Group, took part in the survey and said many questions were difficult to answer.

"I was quite concerned about the detailed questions about my relationship with other stakeholders and how we all work together," Ms Smiles said. "It felt like a strategy to profile the groups that are coming out against mining, rather than listening to our concerns."

The council said the findings would be made public next year.