

# Hunter stud owner shuts the gate to stop mining companies bolting across his land

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IT WAS the cradle of a national plan to regenerate farms and fight salinity, but a Hunter Valley horse stud is now a target for a new coalmine.

Peter Andrews developed the practice of "natural sequence farming", which involves building earthworks and planting trees to mimic original landscapes, on his property at Tarwyn Park, near Bylong.

The practice, which was championed by the former governor-general Michael Jeffery and the businessman and thoroughbred breeder Gerry Harvey, has since been applied to hundreds of degraded Australian farms.

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But Mr Andrews has barred his gates to Anglo American Coal workers seeking to drill bores on the property to locate and measure the coal seams beneath it, and neighbouring landholders have followed suit.

Korea Electric Power Corp has said it intends to start mining in the area by 2016, although it has not specified whether it plans to develop underground or open-cut mines.

"We don't know exactly what they're proposing but the potential is that they will destroy the aquifer under the property by drilling," said Stuart Andrews, Mr Andrews's son.

"With the aquifer damaged, the place would just die."

Mr Harvey, who owns a nearby horse stud, added his opposition to the mining proposal.

"Tarwyn is a living case study of how we can get it right when it comes to water use and sustainable agriculture," he said in a statement.

"The place should be a bloody shrine, not a hole in the ground. The irony – and stupidity – of possibly losing a place like Tarwyn to mining is simply breathtaking."

About 420 million tonnes of coal suitable for power generation are thought to lie beneath the horse studs, and the entire Tarwyn Park property lies within the area covered by the exploration licence.

Korea Electric Power Corp, which is majority-owned by the government of South Korea, bought exploration rights to the area from Anglo American Coal earlier this year for \$403 million. The sale is yet to receive final approval from the Foreign Investment Review Board.

Anglo American Coal, which is continuing exploration work, said there was no chance the aquifer would be damaged or polluted by the drilling.

"The borehole when completed is grouted or cemented and is then completely impermeable and thus does not affect the water aquifer," the company said in a statement to the *Herald*.

"Whether there is a true potential for a mine, whether open cut or underground, is contingent on information derived from the exploration drilling program."

It said a plan to drill 18 test holes across Tarwyn Park and neighbouring properties would go ahead at "the earliest opportunity, pending approvals".

It is understood the company has spoken to some landholders in the district and believed it had been granted access to drill bores in return for compensation, before the current stand-off.

[CLARIFICATION: The article gives the impression that Peter and Stuart Andrews have 'locked out' Anglo, which is not quite the case. Instead, the situation is that no access agreement has yet been reached with the miner because of concerns regarding potential aquifer damage (amongst other issues.) Negotiations are continuing (as at 25/11).]