

# Farmers' call for mining moratorium rejected

By David Mark and staff

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An open cut mine in the Hunter Valley near Newcastle. (AAP Image: Dean Lewins)

The New South Wales Planning Minister Tony Kelly has rejected calls for a moratorium on any new mining or coal seam gas projects in the state.

The New South Wales Farmers Association has called for the halt until after a strategic plan is developed.

Its Vice President Fiona Simpson has told AM that there has been exponential expansion in mining, particularly in the coal seam gas industry.

She says the moratorium is needed.

"We're calling for it because of the concerns that our members have about this rapidly expanding industry and the fact that we don't think that science is keeping up with it and we don't think that legislation is keeping up with it," she said.

Last week farmers from the Hunter Valley staged a protest in Sydney against coal seam gas development.

Fiona Simpson says there is not enough research on the environmental impacts of the technology.

"Well particularly with an industry such as coal seam gas development, it's a very new industry," she said.

"In Australia the oldest coal seam gas developments we have are in Queensland and even as recently as last week we are seeing a number of problems with them in terms of water and water contamination.

"We think that we need a whole lot more research and we need a whole lot more science in this before our members can feel confident about this industry."

However, the State Government says a moratorium would cost hundreds of jobs.

Planning Minister Tony Kelly says any applications are subject to a rigorous approval process.

He is meeting with farmers association representatives today to discuss a sustainable plan for coal mining but says he is not prepared to consider a moratorium.

"It may take us some time to develop this strategy and in that time it would hold back the assessment of the proposals, some of them are in the department's approval process now," he said.

"(These are) mines that, unless they get approval, hundreds of people will lose their jobs because they're just an expansion of a current mine."

Deputy CEO of the New South Wales Minerals Council Sue-Ern Tan agrees.

"We think a call for a moratorium on all mining is irresponsible, ill-informed and will do untold damage to the state's economy and regional communities," she said.