

Farmers take on coal

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29 Oct, 2010 10:06 AM

ADOPTION of the NSW Office of Water draft guidelines would nip the war between the NSW Farmers Association and the NSW Minerals Council in the bud.

The draft document, called Management of stream/aquifer systems in coal mining developments, was completed in 2005 but no action has been taken on the guidelines.

The document requests a minimum of 150 metres buffer between open cut mining and any third order stream and no mining of alluvial flats.

Hunter Valley Water Users Association chairperson Arthur Burns said it is a conservative figure given Queensland's has a guideline of 500 metres.

Rivers SOS, an alliance of over 40 environment and community groups concerned with the impact of mining in NSW on the state's rivers, recommends a 1km distance.

On this basis, Mr Burns said the 150 metre recommendation was not asking a lot.

His comments come on the back of a call by the NSW Farmers Association to stop any new mining or coal seam gas development across the state until a strategy into coal mining is implemented.

"We are not opposed to mining and coal seam gas development, but want to see a balance when decisions are made about where development can take place," NSW Farmers Association Mining Taskforce chair Fiona Simpson said in a press statement issued on Tuesday.

The taskforce was formed in response to Mr Burns' motion at the NSW Farmers Association's annual conference in Sydney in July that asked for a moratorium of mining on all alluvial flats.

That motion was unanimously supported.

The Coal & Allied Carrington West pit is set to be the first mining development that challenges the motion.

Mr Burns said Carrington West was 'an important one'.

The Hunter Valley Water Users Association has already decided to object to the proposal based on concerns for the potential impact on ground water aquifers and disturbance of the Hunter River itself.

The deadline for submissions on this project close on November 5.

Mr Burns yesterday highlighted this development to NSW Farmers.

Meanwhile the call for a moratorium on all mining has been likened to using a sledge hammer to crack a walnut by the NSW Minerals Council. NSW Minerals Council deputy chief executive officer Sue-Ern Tan said the response was disproportionate and extreme.

“Putting a stop to new mines or extensions while a strategic plan is developed is completely impractical.

“It will affect investment decisions, hurt future job prospects in regional areas and make New South Wales the ugly duckling of Australian states for doing business,” she said.

“There is clearly a middle ground here on this issue. That’s why we want to continue working with other sectors and the government for the benefit of the show state, not just individual interests,” she said.

In terms of the final outcome, Mr Burns said it was anyone’s guess.

“I don’t know why the government, when it has decided to have a good look at mining, why the hell it is letting some of the mining go ahead while a strategic study is yet to be completed,” Mr Burns said.