

NSW Government under pressure over Hunter Valley mines

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A Hunter Valley farmer believes its now up to the state government to prove it can strike a balance between coal mining and other land users in the region.

- [Map: Singleton 2330](#)

Peter Dixon-Hughes, from Denman, is a member of the NSW Farmers executive council that has met with the NSW Planning Minister, Tony Kelly, to demand a moritorium on new mines and coal seam gas development.

Mr Kelly told the farmers that wasn't possible.

The NSW Minerals Council estimates 50 potential projects are in the pipeline for the state worth about \$13 billion and creating 5,000 new jobs, many in the Upper Hunter.

Mr Dixon-Hughes said the government's forthcoming strategic mining plan for the region must address farmer's concerns.

"It is about striking this balance between agriculture and mining and making sure the two co-habitate." he said.

"Now, there's been a lot of talk but its not resulting in a lot of action and that's where we need to have a bit of a pause and really start doing some regional planning."

Hunter Valley thoroughbred breeders have backed the farmers call for a moritorium.

John Messara from Arrowfield Stud wants the government to reconsider its rejection of the request.

"I think its a rational approach, we're not saying what ultimately a proper independent view of all this will find, we're saying that we're at a tipping point now," Mr Messara said.

"We, in the Hunter Valley, particularly with the coal mines and before its too late, let us have a pause, let us look at the competing land uses, let us get some proper independent look at this thing and decide how we go forward."

The prominent thoroughbred stud owner remains optimistic the state government will act on independent recommendations from the Bickham mine controversy.

In May 2010, the NSW Government banned open cut mining on the property near Murrurundi, north of Scone, because of its potential impacts on local water supplies and horse breeding.

The Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) also found there was strong evidence to ban open coal mining in the Upper Hunter.

Mr Messara wants the government to spell out where it stands on that recommendation.

"It has to some extent slipped off the radar other than dealing with Bickham, the PAC went further than that, they saw this as being symptomatic of other areas in the region," he said

"There was a very positive response from the Premier and by Mr Kelly, I'm still hopeful that will lead to something like the moratorium that's being called for here."

Peter Dixon-Hughes said Upper Hunter industries are united on the need for an investigation into the impacts of mining on the region.

"The viticulture and wine people from the Hunter are meeting with Tony Kelly shortly to discuss the same sorts of issues," he said.

"Its about time that we had this joint force to make sure that we do have a proper assessment done of the cumulative impacts at a regional level."

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