

opinion

OUR SAY:

Mid-West deserves to be consulted

The NSW coal and gas strategy scoping paper, released last week, identified the northern half of the Western Basin - specifically the areas around the existing Moolarben, Ulan and Wilpinjong mines, Bylong and Mt Penny, and the proposed Cobbora Coal mine - as one of the areas where most of the growth in the coal and coal seam gas industries over the next 25 years is likely to occur.

The scoping paper is intended to give the community a chance to comment on how this growth will affect them and how they believe these effects can be controlled or mitigated.

Why then, is the Department of Planning refusing to hold a consultation forum in Mudgee?

Minister for Planning Tony Kelly has announced that consultation forums will be held in "key locations". These are Gunnedah, Lithgow (February 25), Singleton and Illawarra.

Mudgee, despite being central to one of the major growth areas for the industry, is apparently not considered a "key location".

In response to requests from the Mid-Western Regional Council, the Mid-Western Community Action Group, the Bylong Valley Protection Alliance, the Nature Conservation Council and the Mudgee District Environment Society that a meeting be held in Mudgee instead of or as well as in Lithgow, the Minister's office has stated that Lithgow would be the only meeting for the Western area, and encouraged those unable to attend to send in submissions.

Many Mid-Western Region residents will travel to the Lithgow meeting. Others may not be able to make the trip.

Continued refusal to hold a forum at a place that is convenient to those who may be most affected by the outcome of the strategy casts doubt on the State government's commitment to meaningful community consultation.