NSW GOVERNMENT PROTECTS MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR NSW THOROUGHBRED INDUSTRY – STOPS COAL MINE IN UPPER HUNTER

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NSW’s multi-billion dollar thoroughbred industry – the world’s second largest – will be protected following a State Government decision to prohibit coal mining at the Bickham site in the NSW Upper Hunter.

The NSW thoroughbred industry injects approximately $2.4 billion into the State economy each year.

Premier Kristina Keneally and Minister for Planning, Tony Kelly, today announced the Bickham Coal Project – a proposal for an open cut mine to extract coal for the next 25 years – will not proceed.

In addition, the NSW Government will immediately amend the Mining State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) to prohibit open-cut mining on the Bickham site permanently.

The NSW Government accepted the independent Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) recommendations.

The project was stopped due to risks of water contamination and drainage particularly on the Pages River and the incompatibility of land use - threatening the viability of the region’s internationally renowned thoroughbred breeding industry.

The thoroughbred industry estimates that more than $5 billion has been invested by Hunter Valley thoroughbred breeding studs and broodmare farms in NSW over the last decade.

The decision follows a strategic assessment of coal mining in the Upper Hunter Valley initiated by the Department of Planning in 2005 as well as a detailed review by the PAC and assistance from specialist surface water and groundwater experts.

“This decision gives the State’s thoroughbred industry the increased certainty it needs to continue to harness the dynamic global market – of which it is a leader,” Ms Keneally said.

“We will not jeopardise the growth of this important Australian export industry.

“Furthermore, this mine is simply not compatible with the unique rural characteristics of this locality, including the horse-breeding industry.

“It is also clear from the PAC report that potential impacts on local water resources would far outweigh any benefits of proceeding with the project.”

Minister Kelly said that the PAC’s review of water studies provided additional technical rigour and expertise to the Department of Planning’s assessment of the project.

“The PAC received submissions from stakeholders, and conducted public hearings and meeting with experts, Government agencies, local government and industry groups,” Mr Kelly said.
“The decision not to proceed with the project follows several years of strategic and independent studies of the potential impacts of coal mining in the Upper Hunter Shire.

“This included a strategic assessment initiated by the Department in 2005, which recommended that water studies be prepared before any proposal for the Bickham Coal project could progress.”

Background facts

- Australia's thoroughbred breeding operations have been concentrated in the Hunter Valley for some 150 years and the Hunter Valley is nationally and internationally recognised as Australia's thoroughbred breeding capital.

- The Hunter Valley:
  - is one of 3 International Centers of Thoroughbred Breeding Excellence (alongside Kentucky in the US and Newmarket in the UK);
  - has the second largest concentration of horse studs in the world outside of Kentucky, USA.
  - produces around half of all thoroughbreds born in Australia annually;
  - produces around 70% in volume and 80-90% in value of Australia's thoroughbred exports;
  - is supported by a network of support industries which are located in the Hunter including the Scone Veterinary Hospital - the largest equine hospital in the Southern Hemisphere;
  - supports local communities – more than 70% of all capital expenditure by thoroughbred breeders in the Hunter Valley is spent in the region;
  - employs an estimated 200,000 people in the Hunter Valley and hundreds of thousands of people across its value chain;
  - contributes to national and state economies - $5 billion in national revenues (2006); over $41 billion in state and federal taxes; $2.4 billion to the NSW economy and is in a strong position to take advantage of burgeoning growth in large Asian export markets.