



Wineries and horse breeders unite in battle to save their livelihoods

Digging in over super mine plan

By PETER TRUTE

Environment Reporter

WINEMAKERS and thoroughbred breeders fear a massive coal mine planned for the Hunter Valley will threaten the future of their industries.

The Hunter Valley is considered the most important nursery for champion racehorses in Australia and breeders have demanded the proposed Anvil Hill coal mine near Muswellbrook not be allowed.

They have been joined in their opposition by the Upper Hunter Winemakers Association, which represents 25 grape growers and wine makers — including Rosemount Estate — which are responsible for half the region's output.

The Hunter Valley Breeders Association said a new open-cut mine of the scale proposed by Centennial Coal would create dust which could make horses sick, further diminish already-stressed water supplies and reduce the growing of feed in the area.

"When water is becoming ever more scarce, we cannot accept that new coal mines with massive water consumption can be approved," the association's submission to the Government says.

Water users on the Hunter are allowed only 8 per cent of their licenced annual allocation.

The new mine will use between one and four

million litres of water a day — some of which will come from the river.

Breeders Association committee member Peter O'Brien, who manages the prestigious Coolmore Stud, home to Melbourne Cup champion Makybe Diva, said it could affect perceptions of the Hunter as a breeding area.

"If mines keep opening, clients are going to be reticent to have their horses at a farm that's beside a mine," he said.

The Upper Hunter Winemakers Association will also deliver a submission opposing the mine to the Government this week.

"This proposed mine will directly affect some of our individual members and it has the potential to seriously impact on the future viability of our industry in this region," the submission says.

Association president Peter Orr said loss of vineyards to mining, dust and dwindling water supplies were major concerns.

"We don't want to be seen as sensationalist, placard-waving greenies, we just want to look after the interests of our industry," he said.

Centennial Coal says the 10.5 million tonne-per-year mine will employ 240 people.

Environment groups have been campaigning against the mine and calling on the Govern-

ment to move away from coal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

A group called the Anvil Hill Alliance, comprising about 30 environment organisations has formed to oppose the mine, saying it will jeopardise the Hunter Valley and fuel climate change.

The mining industry has hit back, with NSW Minerals Council chief executive Nikki Williams last week writing an open letter to Sydney newspapers attacking "publicity stunts by a handful of activists".

Dr Williams wrote that shutting down coal production was "a nonsense" which would "destroy NSW's economy".

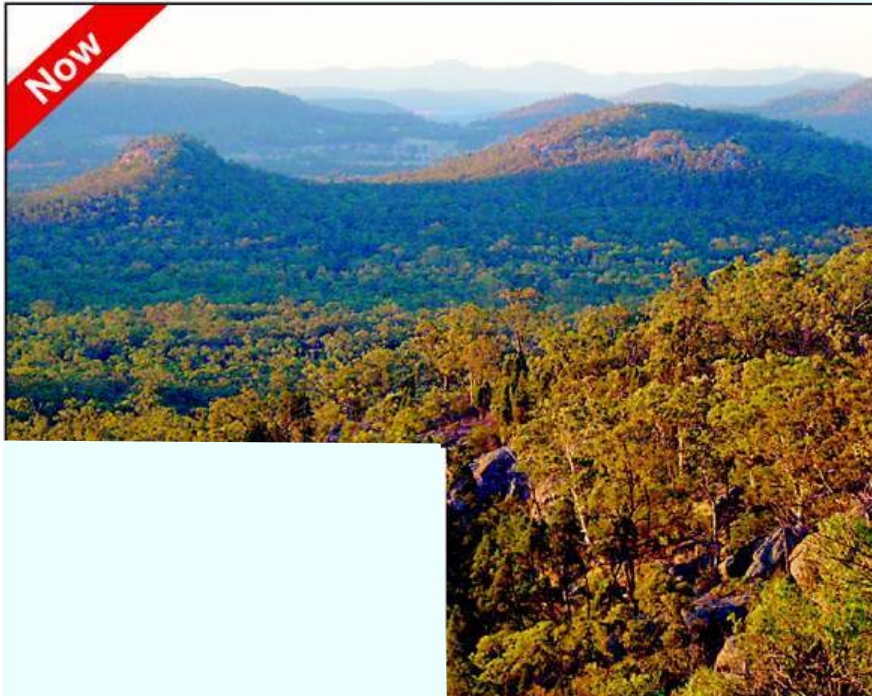
However, Mr O'Brien challenged the coal industry's claims of providing extra employment.

"When they say a new mine will employ 200 people, between Coolmore and [Hunter Valley stud] Woodlands we employ that many," he said.

Centennial Coal external affairs manager Katie Brassil said the company welcomed submissions to the environmental assessment of the mine.

"The environmental assessment for the Anvil Hill Project follows years of technical study and community consultation," she said.

Public consultations on the environmental assessment close on Friday.



Open cut . . . the proposed Anvil Hill coal mine site



Major mine . . . how the Anvil Hill mine could look