



Caroona Coal Action Group Inc.

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## **Disgust as Nationals abandon farmers on Murray Darling Bill**

Twenty-four hours after voting to support legislative changes to protect Murray-Darling groundwater systems and farming lands from the risks of large-scale mining, the National Party has 'gone to water' itself and sided with mining interests.

Caroona Coal Action Group spokesman Tim Duddy said he was disgusted that the National Party had abandoned its core constituency in a decision vital to the future of farming in this country.

"On Wednesday, National Party members stood in the Federal parliament and told us how important it was to support changes to the Water Amendment Bill 2008 that protected some of this country's most precious agricultural land from mining impacts," Mr Duddy said.

"Overnight, presumably after a little persuasion from the mining industry, they suddenly go to water and reverse their position. No wonder rural Australia has lost all trust and faith in them," he said.

The specific amendment in question – drafted by Independent New England MP Tony Windsor and introduced to the Senate by Greens Leader Bob Brown – added a provision in the legislation which required an independent water study to be undertaken prior to any mining exploration licences being issued in any areas with groundwater linked to the Murray Darling basin system.

Where that study identified any substantial risks to those groundwater systems, mining exploration licences could not be granted.

"This legislation is vital if anyone is really serious about saving the Murray Darling basin or has even the slightest interest in the future of water and farming in this country," Mr Duddy said.

"It is extraordinary that in 2008, with what we have already done to the Murray Darling and all we know about the precious nature of our water systems, that mining dollars still win the debate over environmental protection," he said.

CCAG is fighting plans by BHP-Billiton to develop a large-scale coal mine at Caroona on the Liverpool Plains. Since July, farmers have blockaded properties to prevent BHP entering to test drill under an exploration licence issued by the NSW Government in 2006.

Mr Duddy said the NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, had already acknowledged the need for an independent catchment-wide water study on the Liverpool Plains and convened a working party to establish the study including CCAG, BHP, the Minerals Council and his department. Those talks are still progressing.

"We will fight for as long as it takes to protect our precious environment on the Plains but frankly no other community should have to endure what we've been through," Mr Duddy said.

"The legislation requiring mandatory water studies in all of these fragile areas would have guaranteed the future of our agricultural lands – thanks to the National Party, some of our most productive land in Australia remains under grave threat," he said.

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"We must ensure mining does not destroy our environment, agricultural production, people's livelihoods, health and attachment to the land"