



Caroon Coal Action Group Inc.

www.ccag.org.au PO Box 119 Caroon NSW 2343

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Namoi Valley community welcomes Water Study Funding

The Caroon Coal Action Group has described as a ‘giant step forward’ the Federal Government’s \$1.5 million commitment to help fund an independent catchment-wide water study in the Namoi Valley.

Federal Water Minister Penny Wong committed the funding after a tumultuous week in Canberra which saw the parliament debating numerous amendments to the Water Amendment Bill 2008 – including measures to protect the Murray Darling catchment from the potential impacts of mining activities.

One amendment – introduced by Independent MP for New England Tony Windsor and backed by the Greens leader Bob Brown – would have required a water study to be undertaken prior to any mining exploration being allowed in the Murray Darling catchment. The amendment was defeated when the National Party, despite twice voting for the change, capitulated under heavy lobbying from the mining industry and withdrew its support.

CCAG spokesman Tim Duddy said despite that bitter disappointment, the community greatly appreciated Minister Wong’s funding pledge and the tireless efforts of Tony Windsor and Bob Brown who had successfully elevated the water study issue onto the national stage.

“At last the Federal Government has recognised the huge agricultural significance of this precious area and through this funding commitment have helped advance efforts to secure its long-term protection,” Mr Duddy said.

“It is a most unusual situation that farmers find their interests best served by Labor, Independents and the Greens whilst the National Party were left cowering in the corner from the pressure brought to bear by the mining lobby,” he said.

The Federal Government’s funding pledge comes as a working party convened by the NSW Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald is finalising the terms and objectives of an independent water study to be conducted in the Upper Namoi catchment.

CCAG has been campaigning for the catchment-wide study since 2006 when BHP Billiton was issued an exploration licence at Caroon on the Liverpool Plains as part of a plan to develop a large-scale underground coal mine in the area.

Mr Duddy said the working party, chaired by former MP Pam Allan, would meet again in Tamworth later in the week where efforts would be made to confirm the funding support of other parties involved in the water study process to match the Commonwealth’s commitment.

Contact: Tim Duddy 0427 106267

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