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MINING WARDEN'S DECISION CONFIRMS NSW MINING LAWS CANNOT PROTECT THE LIVERPOOL PLAINS

Farmers fighting to protect the Liverpool Plains from the impacts of large-scale mining say a decision by the Chief Mining Warden only confirms that NSW planning and approval processes overwhelmingly favour mining over the environment.

The Chief Mining Warden, sitting in Gunnedah, yesterday granted BHP Billiton access to drill on a number of farms in the Caroon district against the objections of all four landholders who raised serious concerns about the environmental risks of BHP's operations.

The community is now seeking legal advice on its options to challenge the decision. A blockade remains in place on another property where BHP was granted an access 'agreement'.

Under cross-examination during the case in March, BHP employees gave inconsistent evidence about the procedures the company followed when exploration drilling to minimise the risk of contamination of the precious aquifer systems in the Liverpool Plains region.

Caroon Coal Action Group spokesman Tim Duddy said the fact that the Chief Mining Warden issued multiple Access Agreements despite what had emerged during the hearings left the community with 'no faith whatsoever' in NSW Mining legislation.

"The community has said from day one that the current laws covering mining in NSW not only fail to properly protect the environment but also leave landholders with no rights whatsoever to protect their livelihoods, the water systems, or their land," Mr Duddy said.

"The Chief Mining Warden's decision yesterday could not have illustrated that fact more clearly.

"It is a disappointing result given that the NSW and Federal governments have already acknowledged the need for an independent catchment-wide water study in this region to map the unique aquifer systems here and properly understand the risks posed by large-scale mining.

"Today's events have only cemented the community's resolve to ensure no exploration or mining occurs until that water study has provided everyone with the detailed data required to properly assess and understand the risks of any future mining," Mr Duddy said.

Mr Duddy acknowledged the crucial support of National Farmers Federation, NSW Farmers and the Australian Farmers Fighting Fund.

"Many communities have faced this David and Goliath battle before and been crushed by the might of large multinational companies. We are indebted to the AFFF for backing our community in a fight that our children and their children cannot afford us to lose," 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"