

# Independent

Serving Gunnedah and district

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# Mining in the wars

BY WENDY SPOONER

**THIS week is a huge week for the confluence of mining and agriculture in the Gunnedah Basin.**

A Federal Senate Committee is today having a public hearing in Gunnedah Shire Council's chambers between 12.45pm-3pm.

Plus, the Mining Warden's Court sits in Gunnedah Courthouse at 10am this Thursday to hand down the decision on access agreements between four Caroonia landholders and Coal Mines Australia Ltd, the parent company of BHP Billiton.

This morning, Philip Clark, who is Vice-President, Resource Development, BHP Billiton Energy Coal, confirmed that from next Monday in Gunnedah Courthouse another group of Caroonia landholders - Ben Evans, Sandy Blomfield, Allan Grant and Michael Hockey - would also be challenging the previous determination made on the access agreements.

"It's the same sort of challenge," Mr Clark said.

Also, last Thursday, the NSW Greens tabled a bill in the NSW Parliament called the Mining (Safeguarding Agricultural Land and Water From Mining) Amendment Bill 2009.

Today's Senate Committee hearing comprises politicians from the Liberal Party and the Nationals. They include Senator Bill Heffernan (Liberal Party; meeting chair), Senator Fiona Nash (Nationals), Senator for NSW and the Nationals Whip in the Senate John Williams (Nationals) and Senator Mary-Jo Fisher (Liberal Party).

Prior to the public hearing, committee members will go to the epicentre of the Caroonia landholders' protest against mining on the Liverpool Plains - "Rossmar Park", owned by the Duddy fam-

ily - which has been blockaded by concerned farmers since July 17 last year to prevent BHP Billiton from exploring its mining lease.

"The Nationals promised during our visit in January to bring a hearing to the area and we are standing by that commitment," Senator Nash said.

This morning, Senator Williams said: "We've only got six written submissions." But he said that the committee would also allow people who did not provide a submission to speak.

"The committee is here to listen to the people," he said.

Senator Williams said submissions would be heard from soil scientist Robert Banks, Pauline Roberts and Jeff Brown (a joint submission); Carol Mackerras, Rosemary Nankivell, Phoebe Clift, Patricia Duddy and Susan Lyle.

"This committee is about securing Australia's food production," Senator Williams said. "What we are concerned about is losing food production in Australia ... there will be recommendations coming out of the committee meeting ..."

He said that, the Nationals would, "the next time it comes up", be looking towards further tightening the regulations regarding an amendment to the Water Amendment Bill made by Senator Bob Brown in November 2008. The amendment had originally been proposed in the lower house by New England Independent Tony Windsor in October 2008.

"Next time, we're going to put an amendment up that if mining is going to have a negative effect on that country, then mining will not be allowed to proceed," Senator Williams said.

"The prime agricultural land of the Liverpool Plains must be protected as it is part of Australia's food bowl and vital for the nation's exports."

At the NSW level, the Greens are

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## NO NEW COAL



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*AN image from the Greens NSW No New Coal campaign. The Greens last week tabled a Bill to safeguard prime agricultural land from mining.*

making the running with their own Bill, tabled by Greens MP and mining spokeswoman Lee Rhiannon last Thursday. It is expected that the bill would be debated on June 4, after Parliament resumes on June 1, NSW Greens member of Parliament John Kaye said this morning.

"It's actually pointed straight at the Gunnedah Basin to ... stop the destruction," Mr Kaye said. "It [concerns] Class 1 and Class 2 agricultural land which can sustain regular cultivation - it wouldn't include grazing land."

Ms Rhiannon said: "The Greens have introduced this bill to safeguard the long-term future of agricultural producers, such as the Caroonia farmers in the fertile Liverpool Plains, who are battling to save the valuable farming land around Gunnedah.

"This bill would prohibit new mining developments and mining

exploration on land defined as prime agricultural land. The bill would also ban mining and mining exploration within a kilometre of the rivers and aquifers that feed prime farmland.

"We are sending a clear message to the government that safeguarding farming land and water catchments needs to be put before mining interests. Future generations will pay for this destruction decades after profits have been posted and mining operations closed down.

"The world is facing the prospects of increasing food insecurity. A chorus of climate-change scientists are predicting that there will be smaller average harvests around the world, predicting that some areas will become unfarmable."

Mr Kaye said: "The CIA's own analysis in the past two years points to climate change, water

and food as key causes of war in the 21st century.

"The Liberal Party has completely sold out to the coal industry. [With this Bill] we're giving them a chance to prove [they care]." The Gunnedah Basin, a major food-growing area with a regular water supply, was "one of the most drought-tolerant areas in Australia".

Ms Rhiannon said: "High-quality farming land is a finite, limited and precious resource ... Water supplies in our state's prime agricultural-producing areas such as the Gunnedah Basin and the Gloucester Valley are threatened by the runaway expansion of the coal industry in NSW. The evidence is already in that open-cut and longwall coal mining causes lasting damage to aquifers and water catchment areas."

But NSW Minerals Council CEO, Dr Nikki Williams, said last Thursday: "Like agriculture, mining's future is dependent on having sustainable operations that respect and benefit both the local environment and community. There is no other way to do business.

"That means listening and responding to concerns from farming families, mining families, business people and all the other people who make up this community."

The seven-month Namoi Catchment water study working group's last meeting was held last Wednesday and its recommendations handed to Mineral Resources Minister Ian Macdonald last Thursday.

The group comprised members of the Caroonia Coal Action Group (CCAG), mining companies such as Idemitsu, BHP Billiton and China Shenhua Energy Co, and irrigators representative Namoi Water.

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FIREFIGHTERS continue clean-up operations at the scene of the fire at Paradise Farms last Thursday.

# Seeds spark reaction

**A HEROIC eight-hour effort by Gunnedah firefighters helped save dozens of tons of produce after a fire caused by "spontaneously combusting" seeds.**

More than a dozen firefighters dealt with a blaze at Paradise Farms, caused after smouldering seeds ignited in a shed.

Gunnedah Fire Station Commander Rod Byrnes said crews were called out to the Mullaley Road complex about 5am on Friday after reports of smoke and the shed "glowing red from heat".

Firefighters went into the shed, which he said contained about 100 tonnes of sunflower kernels and cooled the atmosphere to control the risk of

explosion, before the blaze was extinguished.

Panels were removed from part of the shed in the "fairly intense" heat while damaged seeds were removed.

About 80 tonnes of grain were safe and were left in the shed for the owners.

The complex was evacuated throughout the eight-hour operation due to the risk of an explosion.

Commander Byrnes said combustion occurred when seeds had been sitting for some time and reacted unpredictably with moisture.

The shed may need replacing because of the damage and the clean-up operation, he said.



REPAIR work continues at the damaged shed.

No-one at the complex was available for comment.