



# MEDIA RELEASE

## Mining affected councils' fair deal fight continues

The Association of Mining Related Councils (AMRC) has a new leadership team continuing the battle for a fair deal from the NSW Government, following the recent local government elections. The new Chair is Cr. Col Mitchell, Mayor of Wollondilly Shire Council, with his two Deputies being fellow regional council veterans, Cobar Shire Mayor, Cr. Lilliane Brady OAM and Singleton Council's Mayor, Cr. John Martin OAM.

The AMRC's 24 member councils are united by their common experiences in struggling to address the impacts of mining; cost burdens that go beyond the financial capacity of their rate base.

Members from Wollongong to the Hunter, the Central West, west to Cobar and Broken Hill and North West to Gunnedah and Narrabri came together in the Association's Annual meeting last Friday. The meeting was hosted by Narrabri Shire Council and followed a tour of the Whitehaven Coal mine near Narrabri, conducted by the informative and frank mine management. The AMRC was told that the mine has a total of 300 employees, with competitive salaries. Yet, skilled labour attraction remains a challenge but retention does not. Up to 50 percent of the workforce is local and the mine had to resort to a fly-in fly-out approach. The mine's Project Manager, Steve Bow, said that they are committed to training, up-skilling and sourcing labour locally and hope to see the proportion of local workers up to over 80 percent within a few years.

Cr. Col Mitchell has picked up the reigns from his predecessor, Gunnedah Shire Councillor, Colleen Fuller and intends to maintain momentum in the AMRC's campaign for a Royalties for Regions Scheme. "We have been leading the campaign for a royalties for regions scheme for a number of years. Now gas extraction has turned up and it is also a state-wide concern. We had two NSW Opposition Members at our meeting. We told them about our mining related issues and what we feel should be done. Both sides of Government have broken promises in the past but we will renew our efforts to see regional councils get a fair part of the NSW Government's mining royalties. In the past year, the State raked in over \$1.8 Billion," Cr. Mitchell said.

Shadow Minister for Resources and Primary Industries, the Hon Minister Steve Whan and Shadow Minister for Regional Development, the Hon Mick Veitch addressed the meeting. Mr Whan conceded that the issues created by mining in regional NSW were not dealt with well by the Labor Party while it was in Government. "We are developing policies now for a future Labor Government and want input from Councils," he said.

"The vague commitments by the Coalition prior to the election have not been fulfilled. The promise of up to \$160mil. for its Resources for the Regions program has not been delivered. To date we've seen substitute funding. In Muswellbrook, we saw funding for the emergency department of a hospital - something that clearly should have been financed through the Health Infrastructure fund, not a program supposed to be assisting the regions to address the affects of mining."

Mr Whan said the Opposition would not commit to a Royalties for the Regions scheme at this stage, with the next election not until 2015. "We do want to commit to a concrete amount. We don't want to table a vague 'up to' promise. We want a mechanism for a fair distribution of funds for councils with mines in their area and those that are downstream."

The AMRC meeting heard from and also informed a four-member panel of planners from the Infrastructure, Planning and Coordination unit with the NSW Government's Department of Planning and Infrastructure. They attended the meeting to investigate and talk to councils about issues in relation to the delivery of funding for infrastructure, particularly for mining affected councils. The NSW Government has recently released two strategic regional land use plans, one for the Upper Hunter and the other for the New England North West. These have resulted in an infrastructure planning process and planning agreement investigations. One option discussed at the meeting was a series of planning agreement templates, whereby Councils might not have to pay for costly advice when negotiating with mining companies.

Cr. Mitchell commended the Government planners for getting out and hearing those at the coalface of mining impacts. "The white paper to inform a new planning Bill has now benefitted from our first-hand experiences and insights. We were told that a costed plan for the Upper Hunter and the New England North West will be delivered by mid-2013."

The Narrabri meeting of the AMRC also voted to invest in and support a University of Queensland research project. "We are all lacking information about the social and health concerns that arise from mining," Cr. Mitchell said. "We are not against mining but there are a lot of unanswered questions."

### Captions:

- Delegates of the Association of Mining Related Councils, during their tour of the Whitehaven Narrabri Coal Mine.
- AMRC Deputy Chair, Singleton Council's Mayor, Cr. John Martin OAM; Shadow Minister for Regional Development, the Hon Mick Veitch; Shadow Minister for Resources and Primary Industries, the Hon Steve Whan; AMRC Deputy Chair, Cobar Shire Mayor, Cr. Lilliane Brady OAM; new Chair, Wollondilly Shire Council Mayor, Cr. Col Mitchell, and Executive Officer, Don Tydd.

*For further information, contact AMRC Chair, Cr Col Mitchell: 0447 619 004.*