MEDIA RELEASE

Planning to get mining affected communities a better deal

When a new mining operation is established, a Voluntary Planning Agreement (VPA) can be negotiated between a local council and a mine operator, which can see the mining company contribute millions of dollars annually towards the council's infrastructure costs. The negotiation process has been a daunting, unstructured challenge for the regional councils of NSW. That is set to change; the Association of Mining Related Councils has been working with the Department of Planning and Environment to help councils to get a better deal for their communities by documenting comprehensive guidelines for the process.

The draft *Planning Agreement Guidelines for State Significant Mining Projects* will be issued in the near future for public comment. "The State Government welcomes and appreciates the input from groups such as the Association of Mining Related Councils to date," Deputy Secretary - Policy and Strategy at the Department, Alison Frame said.

"The guidelines will outline best practice principles and help to build an understanding about the negotiation process in the context of mining assessment. In particular, the guidelines will assist councils and industry in understanding the steps involved in negotiating a planning agreement."

State and Local Governments consider Planning Agreements to be an integral part of the planning system in NSW and an important tool in mitigating community concerns about the impacts of a development. "Planning agreements provide a way for councils and mining companies to negotiate flexible outcomes in respect of development contributions. Because of this, planning agreements can, in certain situations, deliver better outcomes for both mining companies and the community through the delivery of public benefit," Ms Frame said.

The Association Chair, Mayor of Warrumbungle Shire Council, Cr Peter Shinton said that negotiating VPAs has been overwhelming for many small, regional councils in the past and it will be a positive step forward when they do not have to reinvent the wheel, if approaching the Planning Agreement process for the first time. "This is something we lobbied the NSW Government to do and we commend them for building this framework with genuine consultation."

"With no structure existing, a VPA was difficult to negotiate and delivered uncertain outcomes. If you were lucky you got a good one, if you weren't, you didn't. In the Warrumbungle Shire, we worked towards a VPA with a mine that has now been mothballed. We certainly could have done better. I am confident that the new guidelines will facilitate the best possible outcomes from Planning Agreements into the future."

"These VPAs can be multi-million dollar deals and a council needs to factor in all they can in regards to the impacts the mining operations and the people the mine brings in will have."

"The planners in the Department now have consulted with us and come back with a first-draft. I was amazed with what they have achieved."

"Normally, once a VPA has been struck, it is for the life of the mine," said Cr. Shinton. "You also need to plan for economic and social impacts of a mine closure. If workers have lived in the area for 20-25 years and they disappear suddenly, you've got a raft of challenges to deal with, like a big drop in real estate values, which also reduces a council's revenue," Cr. Shinton said.

Senior Planning NSW staff updated the Association on their guidelines for Planning Agreements at its last meeting in Quirindi. The next meeting, on Thursday 13 August, in Sydney, will be addressed by NSW Planning Minister, the Hon. Rob Stokes.

For further information, contact AMRC Chair (and Warrumbungle Shire Mayor) Cr Peter Shinton: **0428 255 420**
Or Chief Executive Officer, Don Tydd: 02 6775 3844 or 0418 681 320.

Caption: AMRC Chair Cr. Peter Shinton, Senior NSW Department of Planning and Environment Staff Alison Frame and Meagan Kanaley, with AMRC CEO Don Tydd.

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For further information on the AMRC, please go to: http://www.miningrelatedcouncils.asn.au/

Association of Mining Related Councils Inc.

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