

PETER DRAPER

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

MEDIA RELEASE

Visit by Minister for Mineral Resources

26th November 2003

NSW Minister for Mineral Resources Kerry Hickey and Independent Member for Tamworth Peter Draper toured the Gunnedah region yesterday (Wednesday). Mr Hickey has travelled to the electorate at the invitation of Mr Draper. Mr Hickey and Mr Draper toured the Whitehaven Coal Mine and met with representatives of the Gunnedah community and various stakeholders in the minerals industry.

Today Mr Hickey will travel to a rhodonite mine near Bendemeer today and meet with the operators John and Alex Taggart.

"I invited the Minister for Mineral Resources to our region to show what potential we have here for our minerals industry, particularly coal. Traditionally, mining was one of the biggest employers in our electorate," Mr Draper said.

"The Whitehaven Mine is a perfect example of the potential for the coal industry in our electorate. Hopefully, Mr Hickey can assist us to further develop the industry in Gunnedah. If we can grow the industry, we can create jobs and boost the local economy."

"Mr Hickey met with Keith Ross and Chris Burgess who operate the mine, and was able to listen first hand to their plans for future expansion in the Gunnedah area, and also be briefed on their prospects further towards Narrabri."

Mr Hickey and Mr Draper also met with the Gunnedah Miners Support Group and representatives of the Gunnedah community, including the Shire Council.

"By the end of the day, Mr Hickey was very aware of the community's passion for the construction of the Ardglen tunnel, and stated his belief that the tunnel would be built at some stage. He pointed out that the Port of Newcastle needed major infrastructure investment to be able to cope with increased volumes of coal, and reinforced the Governments current position that an investment in passing loops would allow growth in the industry in the Gunnedah basin to continue until freight volumes would justify the construction of the tunnel."

"Gunnedah Shire Council, the Chamber of Commerce and others have been working hard to improve the future for local residents in this region. With the help of the NSW Government, we can move forward to create jobs and development opportunities. I thank the Minister for accepting my invitation to travel to the electorate and explore the potential for the local minerals industry."

End release.

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