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MEDIA RELEASE**

NSW MINING COMMITTED TO SUSTAINABLE FUTURE IN GUNNEDAH REGION

Today's announcement by BHP Billiton to restrict coal exploration in the farming region at Caroona near Gunnedah is a win for the State's robust mining assessment process, according to the industry.

NSW Minerals Council CEO, Dr Nikki Williams, said the decision, which was based on two years of rigorous geological research and extensive consultation, proved that mining and agriculture can co-exist based on good science and sustainability principles.

Dr Williams said the sensible and cautious approach applied to the Caroona exploration process had enabled miners, the local community and the government to arrive at a decision that protects the valuable Liverpool Plains farming region, while exploration will proceed in other areas of the coal-rich Gunnedah Basin.

"The extensive mapping and monitoring of the Liverpool Plains underground aquifer undertaken by mineral explorers, which will be shared with government and the local community, provides invaluable data to help inform future land use planning well into the future," said Dr Williams

"The mining industry provides vital jobs and economic wealth to regional communities and enables other businesses, including agriculture, to prosper," said Dr Williams.

"It is a reality of our modern life that mining and agriculture are equally essential, so we must find smart ways using research, technology and sound planning to make the best use of our natural resources.

"Regional communities throughout NSW benefit from the expanded range of services that follow the establishment of long term mining operations, such as telecommunications, rail, road and water infrastructure and government services such as health care, education and recreational facilities."

"Our industry regards as a top priority its responsibilities to the communities in which we operate, to listen to and respond to concerns appropriately. Many miners and their families live in these communities too."

Dr Williams said the NSW Minerals Council will continue to work with farmers groups and the government on strategies that achieve a sustainable balance between agriculture, mining and other important regional land uses.

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