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Mines cast black cloud over breeding industry

Ray Thomas

IMAGINE the rolling hills and thick grasses of the pristine Hunter Valley, one of the world's premier racehorse breeding regions, looking more like a lunar landscape pocked with dusty, giant holes in the ground.

This could be a reality if proposed mining developments in the area are approved.

Huge open-cut coalmines can be found throughout the Hunter Valley these days and are growing at such a rate, they run the risk of hurting the area's breeding industry and other businesses.

At the request of concerned thoroughbred breeders, *The Daily Telegraph* visited the area this week, flying over the region in a helicopter and being shocked by the number of new mines, most

notably the proposed Bickham Mine and the existing Drayton Mine, which are situated perilously close to some of NSW's most magnificent agricultural and pastoral lands, raising fears of pollution to streams and rivers.

And the region was clouded in a hazy mist throughout the day but this was nothing to do with the

heat — it was dust from the coalmines, which has raised concerns about long-term health risks.

The thoroughbred breeders — and there are at least 50 stud farms in the Hunter Valley, including Sheik Mohammed's Darley Woodlands Stud — have formed a united

stance to lobby governments and the mining conglomerates about the threat to the industry if more mines are approved and developed in the region.

"The fact of the matter is there are very few bits of Australia with this sort of acreage and topography, the general terrain of the area, which makes it so good for breeding," Hunter Valley breeders representative Henry Plumtre said.

"In my opinion there are only three regions worldwide like this — Kentucky [US], Newmarket [England] and the Hunter Valley.

"The breeding industry has been here for 150 years. That doesn't

entitle us to stay there, absolutely not, but there are overwhelming economic statistics to back up the fact it is a sustainable agricultural business and a massive employer in the region."

It is estimated the Hunter Valley thoroughbred breeding industry is

a \$5 billion per annum business and is home to more than 100 stallions and 7000 broodmares.

Then there are ancillary businesses which rely on the thoroughbred breeding industry for their livelihoods including veterinarians, farriers, saddlers, equine transport operations and feed merchants.

The breeders are trying to im-

plyore government to look at exploring other regions of the state where impact on existing businesses will be minimal.

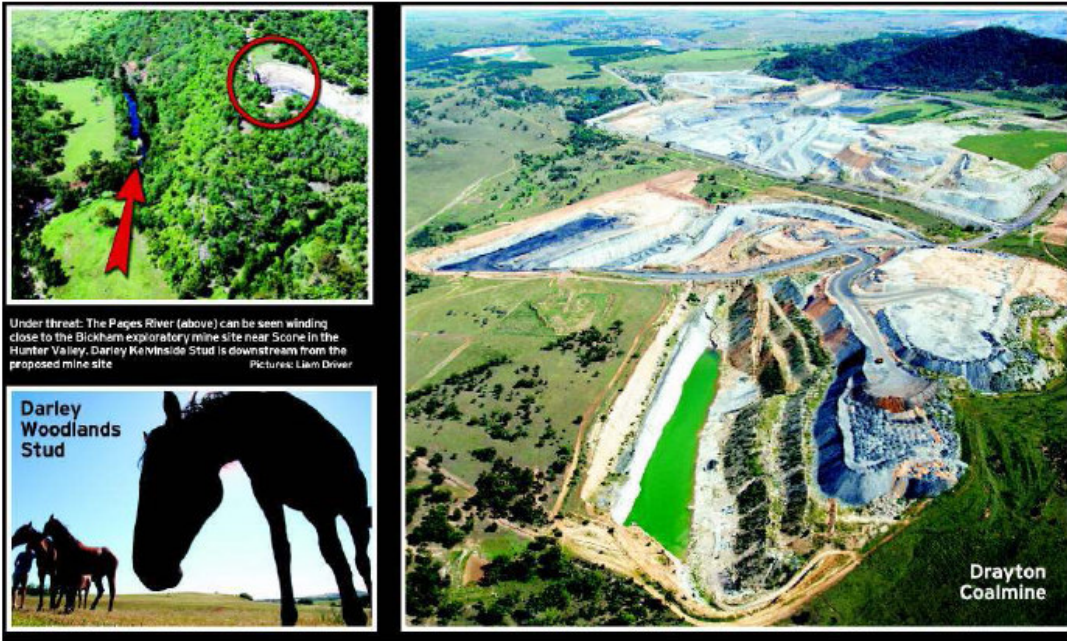
Plumtre confirmed Hunter Valley breeders are also taking up the fight with the Federal Government.

"The Prime Minister and his government has nailed its colours firmly to the mast on environmental pursuits, part of that has to be sustainable agriculture and protecting areas of prime agricultural land," he said.

"Our industry will be sustainable for generations and generations of people but the mines will be here for say 20 years or so, then leave and there won't be much left behind. Is this the legacy governments want to leave?"

Tomorrow: The people most under threat by the mining developments

Continued



Under threat: The Pages River (above) can be seen winding close to the Bickham exploratory mine site near Scone in the Hunter Valley. Darley Kelvinside Stud is downstream from the proposed mine site. Pictures: Liam Driver

The breeding industry has been here for 150 years. It's a sustainable agricultural business and massive employer in the region
