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“Using the Law in Community Campaigns”

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The community must be involved in the assessment and decision making processes of major developments which have the potential to impact the community, ecologically, socially, and financially. The community must have the desire, the knowledge, and the opportunity to influence a decision in order to achieve an equitable outcome.

With a basic understanding of the law and how it can be applied at grassroots level, the community can influence decisions made by local councils, government departments and the courts.

Use of the law must also be accompanied by a variety of other strategies including use of the media, lobbying politicians, sitting on endless committees and enlisting support from other local and global communities and organisations.

Communities impacted by coal mining developments in a State dependant on coal mining generated taxes and royalties take on a challenge almost too big to contemplate. Hunter Valley coalmines will export more than 80 million tonnes of coal through Newcastle in 2005 contributing more than \$300 million in royalties to the State government. They also supply more than 20 million tonnes of coal to the Hunter's power industry, which provides 70% of the State's electricity from 6 coal-fired power stations.

Challenges not only come from multinational mining companies but from all levels of government who are influenced to such a degree that they will sell soul of the community on the prospect of a few jobs.

When individuals dare to challenge the decision makers often the consequences are unexpected and uncompromising.

The State government clearly demonstrated its ability and willingness to pass legislation to override local opposition, effectively preventing court challenges. It has also clearly demonstrated its willingness to sacrifice the Hunter Valley to the ravages of multinational mining companies, shareholders and environmental degradation.

Today, I am highlighting instances where the community has used the law in their strategy with varying degrees of success.