Panel of Experts – Political Donations

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The Hunter Communities Network (HCN) is an alliance of community based groups and individuals impacted by the current coal industry and concerned about the ongoing rapid expansion of coal and coal seam gas exploration and mining in the region.

HCN welcomes the opportunity to comment on the issue of political donations and their impact on NSW Government decision-making and the development and planning process. The community has been directly impacted by the influence of the mining industry over Government decision-making processes.

This was particularly evident with the change made to the Mining SEPP after the Land and Environment Court merits appeal on the Warkworth Mine expansion that rejected the approval of the project.

HCN considers that donations to political parties from mining companies, their staff and contracted public relations and lobbying firms should be prohibited immediately.

As complementary measures to donations reform, New South Wales needs to implement the outstanding items from the 17 recommendations made by the ICAC in 2010 to clean up lobbying and the outstanding ICAC recommendations for removing corrupt behavior in the planning and development approval process.

HCN urges that donations disclosure be more timely and made more accessible in user-friendly databases for the public to search for key terms and names, with data able to be downloaded, and viewed across time.

Steps must be taken immediately to prevent the caps on donations and prohibitions that apply in New South Wales being circumvented by the use of Federal affiliates in the lead up to the 2015 state election.

Yours sincerely

Bev Smiles, Convenor