

Miners buy Hunter land

Scott Elliott

Coalminers Xstrata and Coal & Allied have bought more than 10,000 hectares of prime grazing land in the Hunter Valley in an attempt to improve local sentiment towards the industry.

The miners have purchased five properties in recent months.

Many are close to rich coal seams. However, it is understood the companies are not interested in mining the holdings.

Instead they are reportedly looking for multi-purpose properties with areas of remnant native vegetation and land suitable for cattle production which creates local employment and scope for carbon offsets.

The Dunbeir family have sold their 2500-hectare property west of Muswellbrook to Xstrata for more than \$7 million.

The holding is a substantial property for the area.

The transaction was brokered by property specialist Kevin Price on behalf of Xstrata-controlled AZSA Pastoral Holdings.

The Dunbeir property is close to Xstrata's existing mining operations.

Xstrata Coal refused to comment on the deal. It is the largest coalminer in the Hunter region, managing 10 active tenements across the valley.

In 2007 Xstrata paid \$425



The companies say they want land suitable for cattle production which creates local jobs. Photo: KITTY HILL

million for the Anvill Hill mine, west of Muswellbrook.

Sydney businessman Tony Maurici is understood to be in negotiations with Rio Tinto-controlled Coal & Allied to sell his property, St Antoine.

The 5483-hectare aggregation, St Antoine near Cassilis, is considered one of the largest properties in the upper Hunter and reportedly is capable of carrying more than 2200 breeding cattle.

Coal & Allied is also under-

stood to be purchasing the grazing property Gum Ridge, which has an area of more than 2000 hectares.

It was on the market for a considerable time before Coal & Allied bought.

The same company is understood to have bought another Hunter property, Black Rock, from the Frampton family.

A local agent who did not wish to be named said the presence of mining in the Hunter was a "crying shame" for the area,

given that the properties might never become available again.

"Many of the properties [have been traded] regularly over the past decade and unfortunately, when the miners do buy property, it means it will never hit the market again," he said.

Yarraman Wines managing director Ian Long said it was important that residents and wine industry operators in the Hunter Valley co-existed with coalmining, as opposed to fighting it.