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Farmers rally against mining at Parliament House

The NSW Farmers' Association is throwing its support behind the Mining Amendment (Safeguarding Agricultural Land and Water) Bill which is due to be debated in NSW Parliament on Thursday.

NSW Farmers' Association President Jock Laurie says the Association supports the objective of the Bill in aiming to protect prime agricultural land and its water sources from mining operations, but is seeking some changes to the terms of the Bill. The Association is also encouraging Members to attend a rally at Parliament House on Thursday morning, organised by the Caroon Coal Action Group, to show their support.

"It is good to see the farm and environmental lobbies working together to protect prime agricultural land from mining," Mr Laurie said.

"This has long been an issue for our Members, particularly those based on prime land such as the Liverpool Plains and the Gloucester Valley," Mr Laurie said.

Under the Mining Amendment Bill, new mining developments and mining exploration on land defined as prime agricultural land will be prohibited. The Bill will also protect land associated with rivers and aquifers that feed prime land.

According to Mr Laurie, the Association has requested some changes to the Bill, which it has specified in an open letter to all MPs.

"While we certainly support the general framework of the Bill, it is important to note that we do not support the use of the existing NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) land classification system to define prime agricultural land, as this system is outdated and needs significant improvements," Mr Laurie.

"We have asked for the Bill to be amended so that the definition of prime agricultural land and its water sources can be established by regulation at a future date. The regulation would use a new classification system developed in close consultation with the agricultural sector.

"This definitional issue should not delay passage of the Bill, however," Mr Laurie said.

Around 150 farmers and supporters are expected to converge on Parliament House on Thursday morning to rally in support of the Bill.

"The broad support for this Bill indicates that the time has come for Government to acknowledge the impacts of mining on agriculture and to provide legislation that ensures the sustainability of our most productive farming lands," Mr Laurie said.

"We need to ensure that the voice of agriculture is heard. Agriculture must not be second-best to mining: crop protection must be maintained, prime agricultural land and its water resources must be retained and the nation's agricultural resources safeguarded," Mr Laurie said.

The rally will take place at the front gates of Parliament House at 10:30am on Thursday 4 June.

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