

Boom 2 on its way

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FOR anyone looking forward to the end of the mining boom, there is bad news. It's not coming.

In its place will be a second boom, Boom Two, which will pump about 15,000 new jobs into the mining industry, along with millions of dollars into our region's economy.

The Bowen Basin is already looking forward to 55 new coal mining projects, with 33 of those in the Mackay district. Only three of those are expansions: Kestrel, Carborough Downs and Isaac Plains. Some are still waiting on government approval.

To put that kind of growth in perspective Mackay currently has about 32 coal mines on its doorstep.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) identified 16 new coal projects in just the six months leading up to October 2007. One of the largest coal mine developments in Queensland will be the Rio Tinto open-cut mine near Clermont.

The mining giant will invest \$860 million and the mine will be expected to produce 12.2 million tonnes of thermal coal a year from 2010, replacing the capacity from Blair Athol mine.

A conservative estimate by Queensland Resources Council chief executive Michael Roche was that in the 2008-09 financial year, there would be \$2.5 and \$3 billion in royalties heading to the Queensland Government coffers, much of it from the Bowen Basin.

"Based on current demand, Queensland's coal exports are forecast to grow by around 42% by 2010 and by a further 40% by 2015," Mr Roche said.

"Prices for the next financial year point to hoisting the value of coal production in Queensland from \$18 billion to \$38 billion in less than two years."

Mackay will also face significant challenges as population growth parallels the booming mining sector.

State Government estimates show Mackay can expect to have nearly 130,000 people by 2026 about 40,000 or 42% more residents who will call our booming city home.

REDC chief executive officer Narelle Pearse said even with the challenges, Boom Two was something to look forward to.

"Not everyone is going to be happy economic prosperity puts the pressure on too," Ms Pearse said.

"Things are changing at a rapid pace."

Ms Pearse said one of the challenges of Boom Two would be: Where do the 15,000 new staff come from?

"They either bring them into the region, which affects affordability, or they take people from other industries like retail, hospitality and agriculture."

However, she was positive about the region's ability to cope.

"Boom One we didn't see coming, Boom Two we know about. Any improvements to Mackay will make it an even better place to live."