

\$950m project keeps region booming

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THE \$950 million Clermont Mine project unveiled yesterday will add fuel to the fire of our region's next boom.

Rio Tinto Coal Australia managing director Hubie van Dalsen said the company aimed to lift their Queensland coal production from 21 million tonnes a year in 2007 to almost double that by 2015.

"We believe we have the resources and the reserves to do this," Mr van Dalsen said.

"We will pursue organic growth opportunities at all of our operations Kestrel, Hail Creek and Clermont and we are evaluating greenfield opportunities in the region."

During its construction, Clermont Mine will employ 400 people and then about 380 once it begins operating.

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh and Minister for Mines and Energy Geoff Wilson were on hand as earthworks began.

Mr van Dalsen said growth could trigger hundreds of new jobs in the mining sector as well as flow-on industries and add further strength to regional economies like Mackay.

"We have confidence in the long-term market demand for thermal and coking coal and we believe that advances in technology will enable coal to retain its relevance in a carbon-constrained world."

Clermont Mine is expected to have reserves of 189 million tonnes of coal, giving it a life expectancy of about 17 years.

Mr van Dalsen signalled the mine would be good news for the Clermont township.

"We have been a member of this community for more than 20 years and we are very pleased we can continue our strong relationships with the people and the region."

Coal from the mine will be transported on a 13km conveyor to stockyards and train facilities at Blair Athol Mine. It will then be railed 278km to the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal.

Mr van Dalsen was optimistic the expanded rail lines in the Goonyella Coal Chain could handle this new pressure.

"The planned new rail track, new rolling stock, port expansions and the work by the Goonyella Coal Chain central coordinator are vital to underpin the growth in the mining industry."