

# Coal rush a problem, but a great problem to have

By OWEN JACQUES

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MACKAY'S thriving resource sector has always been something of a double-edged sword.

As another boom begins to look inevitable, concern is growing that our city may not be ready.

Yesterday, the Daily Mercury contacted three distinct groups, all affected by

the power of the mining industry, about the positives and negatives that could be around the corner.

MAIN Co-operative manager Kim Wilson, who works with more than 70 companies in the mining industry, said the boom would be good for Mackay but conceded that the negatives could not be ignored.

"We're definitely going to go through a skills short-

tage," he said.

"The people available will dictate how fast the boom moves.

"Will it change the face of Mackay? It's different to what it was 10 years ago, and it will be different in 10 years. We have to move."

It will create social problems, and put pressure on social services like St Vincent de Paul and Lifeline.

Lifeline client services

manager Kelly Dixon knows about that pressure. She said the first consequence would be low-income earners having a harder time finding accommodation.

"It's not everybody who works at the mines.

"Some may have a small or limited income and crisis accommodation is at capacity as far as I'm aware."

A lack of accommodation and an influx of people

would make it harder for Lifeline to find staff, which meant those who needed Lifeline's counselling the most could be put on hold.

"With our face-to-face counselling, we need to have a waiting list. That's a particular problem."

Mackay Chamber of Commerce chair Martin Lambert said the region would face extensive growing pains but was optimistic

about its benefits.

"Infrastructure is always playing catch-up," he said.

"There are growing pains but we will end up with a hospital being developed and more schools."

He said how Mackay was affected would depend on how big the boom was, and how hard it hit.

"It's a great problem to have. It's better than everything being quiet."

## Premier tips Central Queensland mine exports to soar over decade

# Another export boom is on our horizon



Another resources boom looks set to hit Mackay which will bring with it consequences that are good and bad for the region.

PHOTO: PETER HOLT 270407/277

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MACKAY, hold on to your hard hats – another coal boom is on the way.

This resources boom will be fuelled by an increased demand for our coal with exports expected to skyrocket 42% in less than two years.

And there is already \$11 billion worth of investment in Central Queensland powering ahead with 28 mining projects on the go

along with port and rail expansions.

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh said coal was "by far" the state's most important export, and she expected steep increases in production over the next decade.

"We expect exports to rise by 42% by 2010, and by a further 40% by 2015," Ms Bligh said.

"Beyond 2015, demand is forecast to remain strong."

Last month Ms Bligh also announced a \$400 million

package to upgrade the Queensland Rail Jilalan depot, near Sarina, which when combined with the Hay Point and Dalrymple Bay expansions would push the yard to handle 130 million tonnes, an increase of 38 million tonnes.

Regional Economic Development Corporation (REDC) has already begun investigating how Mackay needs to brace itself for when the next boom hits.

REDC chief executive officer Narelle Pearse said it

was important to know what Mackay needed to have, just to catch up with the current growth.

"We need to ensure we're

second one. The spotlight really is on this region."

Social welfare groups and charities have already been under pressure with the

### 'We need to ensure we're not surprised by a second boom'

— REDC's CEO Narelle Pearse

not surprised by a second boom," Ms Pearse said.

"We've been through it once and we are poised for a

increasing amount of people left out of the boom times, a situation that will be compounded as the mining

juggernaut strides on.

Minister for Mines and Energy Geoff Wilson said in parliament that Queensland's coal industry was powering the state.

He said in Central Queensland alone, there were 17 new mines being constructed and 11 expansions of existing mine sites.

"Over the next five years, potential capital investment in coal mine projects in Central Queensland is estimated to be \$11.5 billion."

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