

Mine job losses triple

1100 workers to go over six months in mining slash, burn

By **OWEN JACQUES**
owen.jacques@dailymercury.com.au

SPECIAL REPORT

THE global financial crisis collided head-on with our region yesterday, and among the casualties were more than 1100 mining staff.

BHP Billiton, which owns 50 per cent of BMA, announced a massive cut to its workforce that amounted to about 6 per cent of its staff – 300 permanent workers and more than 700 contractors.

The company owns eight mines in the region, including Blackwater, Goonyella-Riverside, Peak Downs, Saraji, Norwich Park, the Gregory Joint Venture, South Walker Creek and Poitrel.

A spokesperson yesterday said BMA was not ready to release the details of how many would be cut from each site but said the chopping would not be quick nor painless.

“They will come over the next six months,” the spokesperson said. “They will be spread out.”

Before yesterday, more

THE CASUALTIES

BMA has eight coking coal mines in the Bowen Basin but while the company has not yet indicated how each will be affected, they will include:

- Goonyella-Riverside, 200km south-west of Mackay, north of Moranbah.
- Peak Downs, about 200km south-west of Mackay.
- Saraji, about 220km south-west of Mackay.
- Norwich Park, about 270km south-west of Mackay.
- Gregory Joint Venture, about 360km south-west of Mackay.
- South Walker Creek, about 150km south-west of Mackay
- Poitrel, about 160km south-west of Mackay.

Have you been affected by mining job cuts? Contact reporter Owen Jacques by email: Owen.Jacques@dailymercury.com.au

than 500 miners had lost jobs – now that number has



Acting Premier Paul Lucas fronted the media in Brisbane yesterday after BHP Billiton announced 1100 job cuts from their coking coal projects, the majority of which are in the Mackay region.

PHOTO: DREW CRATCHLEY

tripled.

“It’s a black day,” said Susan Houston, the director of regional development who has been heading our Rapid Response office since its inception.

Only a week ago, Ms

Houston was optimistic about linking up newly jobless miners with more work but now she just sounded exhausted.

“It’s hard when something like this happens, to maintain optimism. You lose

one job and it’s devastating for a family. But you lose 1000 and that’s difficult for a whole region.”

Ms Houston said she had been given “intelligence” on Tuesday afternoon that an announcement was going to

be made but had no idea it would be this bad.

“They’re real people who need real assistance. And we can’t say it will be the last announcement.”

Acting Premier Paul Lucas said the government

Anglo Coal bombshell puts Aquila mine into mothballs

BHP Billiton was not the only company wielding the axe yesterday, with Anglo Coal officially being the first to mothball a mine, putting about 90 out of work.

The miner will put its smallest underground project, Aquila, which is part of the German Creek complex “under care and maintenance” in March, at a great

cost to Incoal which run the mine.

About half of the 96-strong workforce at the mine, some of whom were from Mackay, were given their marching orders on Tuesday night, each told at their shift change, while the remaining workers would stay until March, before they too would be told not to return.

Gary Cochrane is the chair of Bounty Mining, which owns Incoal, and said the contracts were being negotiated right up until lunchtime on Tuesday when he was given the news by Anglo.

He said the bombshell from Anglo Coal had come as a “complete surprise” as the two companies were in the midst of negotiating the

contract’s renewal and could only blame the worsening market conditions.

“It’s going to be a tough market for them to make this decision,” Mr Cochrane said.

“Mines are not easy to stop and they’re not easy to restart. And I suspect the mine will stay closed for 12 months or longer.”

For Incoal, 50 of these

employees represented a third of its workforce, with the other 46 employed as subcontractors.

And because Incoal/Bounty is a smaller business, Mr Cochrane said it would be a struggle to find more work for the crew.

General manager of Anglo Coal’s underground operations, Ernest Johnson, said the company had made a

“strategic decision”.

Mr Johnson blamed the shutdown on the “reduced demand for commodities world-wide.”

“Once operations have stopped and the salvaging and sealing process is complete, the mine will be placed under care and maintenance in accordance with mine safety requirements.”

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