

# BSA figure defends his role in committee

By TROY ROWLING

BASIN Sustainability Alliance (BSA) chairman and Darling Downs farmer David Hamilton is known for his role representing the interests of landholders in the coal seam gas debate.

But in a move that has frustrated some across the Central Highlands, Mr Hamilton has also been revealed as chairman of a steering committee, hired and paid for by Bandanna Energy, to create a proposed research program to determine if full agricultural productivity can be returned to the farming region following subsidence from proposed thermal coal extraction.

Mr Hamilton said the committee expected to complete its draft report of recommendations within the next month.

He said an "extensive" consultation period with impacted landholders followed the release of the draft report, enabling farmers to respond to the proposals.

Mr Hamilton said while a planned meeting with impacted landholders last week had to be cancelled due to scheduling conflicts, he still expected to meet farmers in the following weeks, before the initial report release.

Bandanna Energy is consulting over its environmental impact statement, released earlier this year, for its proposed 10,736ha thermal coal project in the Central Highlands.

Bandanna has set aside \$3 million for research and technology under its announced Independent Agricultural Coexistence Research Committee, led by David Hamilton and USQ soil scientist and Gasfield Commissioner Professor Steven Raine, to investigate the productivity of the soils following rehabilitation.

Mr Hamilton, who also works as an agricultural consultant, has defended his newly created position.

He told Queensland Country Life he had sought detailed feedback from senior colleagues in AgForce and the Queensland Farmers Federation before accepting the position to ensure it would not be viewed as a "conflict of interest".

There is no doubt Mr Hamilton is a well-credentialed professional to accept the position.

He holds a master's degree in agronomy and spent seven years based in Emerald as an agronomist, focused predominantly on irrigated cropping.

Mr Hamilton said the research steering committee was carefully studying existing thermal coal projects on farmland at Illinois in the United States.

He said he expected to travel to the US in the coming months to survey the region first hand.

"I was initially reluctant when Bandanna approached me but I came to the conclusion that it is better to be at the negotiation table than being left in the dark," he said.

"I think it is a perfectly normal for landholders to be sceptical of this process but my reaction is to say that what Bandanna is proposing is perfectly legal and I think everyone would agree the coal and underground mineral resources belong to the people of Queensland.

"They have given me the opportunity to play devil's advocate and, if need be, challenge some of their assumptions."

Mr Hamilton said he would be willing to accept a similar position if approached by the coal seam gas industry.