

Bracing for new mining Boom

Article from:

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The plan to manage growth in the resources-rich Surat Basin will investigate how much and what type of transport infrastructure and housing the region will need to deal with a rapid influx of people drawn by the emerging energy and resources sector.

It also commits the Government to deciding on a strategy to improve the release of affordable land for housing by the end of this year.

Premier Anna Bligh said it was vital the Surat Basin, which includes the Toowoomba, Western Downs and Maranoa local government areas, learned from the experience of the Bowen Basin, near Mackay, where rapid expansion driven by coal mining created community problems. Social housing and economic problems are already making themselves felt in towns such as Dalby, Miles and Chinchilla.

"The emergence of the \$40 billion LNG industry in the Surat will bring wealth for Queensland and we want to ensure the local communities in the region benefit from this growth," Ms Bligh said.

"Our boom areas need to be places where people want to live and raise a family," she said.

Government forecasts say the region, currently home to about 200,000 people, is likely to have an extra 64,000 residents over the next 20 years, and even more depending on the growth of its resources and mining development.

The coal and LNG industries alone are expected to create more than 12,500 jobs in the Surat Basin, with up to eight projects already in line to transport gas to Gladstone for export.

However, a report to be released by the Government today says the region would suffer similar infrastructure and social problems to towns and cities in the Bowen Basin unless "proactive action" was taken.

"The pattern of development in the Surat Basin will differ from the Bowen Basin due to the unpredictable nature of its growth, the presence of established communities, the more dispersed nature of gas developments compared with coal mining, and the significant cropping and other agricultural enterprises in the region," the report says.

Ms Bligh said the government would work with industry and local councils to produce various strategies by the end of this year to deal with the Surat Basin's settlement, affordable housing and also its transport needs.

The Government will hold a regional forum in Roma on March 18 to discuss pressing issues about the region's growth.