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MERYL SWANSON: CANBERRA MATTERS

Bloomfield still caring for its workers 80 years on

I WAS delighted last week to visit Bloomfield Collieries' open-cut mine at Ashtonfield, a great example of a locally owned company doing good work.

My host, Bloomfield Collieries' chairman John Richards, is part of the family that started the mine in 1937 and, 80 years later, it still feels like a family business. It's the oldest continuously running open cut mine in the Hunter, and where my late dad worked for 30 years.

Bloomfield puts its success down to steady growth and innovation, but there is plenty to be said for their vision and values. Their vision is for success through innovation and "our people" and their business values include the wellbeing of workers and the traditional family values of honesty, respect and trustworthiness.

Bloomfield miners are rostered on 8-hour shifts – not the 12-hour shifts that are now commonplace – and the mine still shuts down over Christmas and Easter which means a lot to families.

The Bloomfield Group employs about 500 people across its open-cut mines at East Maitland, and at Rix's Creek near Singleton, and its engineering businesses – Four Mile Engineering in East Maitland, and Kings Engineering in Rutherford and Lithgow.

It has interests in companies specialising in renewable energies, recycling and biofuel production, and has had great success in remediating mined land. From Kurri Kurri, you can still see mounds of overburden moved to mine the coal, and thankfully in time these will also be restored.

At a Hunter Research Foundation breakfast in March, Bloomfield managing director

Brett Lewis said he saw good prospects for the Hunter's coal industry and welcomed the debate about Australia's energy future.

"How much of a part coal plays in the energy mix in the future remains to be seen but we need to have that conversation," he said.

I am happy to be part of the conversation. I know we are in transition, and that we need energy certainty. Companies such as Bloomfield, with a longstanding presence and a solid reputation, should also be part of that conversation.

A VISION FOR GAS

Another local businessman with an eye on energy security is Weston Aluminium owner Garbis Simonian.

Member for Hunter Joel Fitzgibbon and I had the opportunity to take Senator Kim Carr, Labor's Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, to Weston Aluminium last week to meet with Mr Simonian, who is a fierce advocate for gas and a proponent of the Queensland Hunter Gas Pipeline.

We discussed the need for security of energy, which relies on certainty of energy policy – not just for customers facing higher power bills, but for industries such as manufacturing who are big energy users and also big employers in our local area. The Prime Minister's weekly thought bubbles do no constitute an energy policy.

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

My colleague Joel Fitzgibbon and I had a bit of fun at the football on Saturday, when the Bulldogs took on the Goannas. The Bull-



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dogs played well, and it's just the start of the season! We need not mention the score, but thanks to the Goannas for your hospitality.

COME AND CHAT

I'll be at Kurri Kurri Markets in Rotary Park on Saturday. I'll be in the vicinity of the Labor Party stall between 9am and 11am.



PART OF THE COMMUNITY: Bloomfield Colliery and its chairman John Richards.