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Mine boss aghast at stud farm objections

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ANGLO American mining chief Mark Cutifani has set the end of 2013 as the deadline for the NSW government to approve its Drayton South mine project.

Mr Cutifani said if the approvals were not processed by then, the company would lack "continuity", run out of coal to sell and lose its markets.

"Customers will take [coal] from South Africa, Colombia and not the Hunter Valley," Mr Cutifani said.

The NSW government halted its assessment of the Drayton South open-cut application in May because the company "failed" to assess properly its impact on Upper Hunter horse studs.

"I have never seen this anywhere else in the world," the Wollongong-born, now London-based mining chief said.

"What we are talking about is the visual impact [of the mine] on horses."

The government wants Anglo American to intensify its mitigation measures.

The company said it wouldn't change its mine plan again, after 25 consultations with the thoroughbred industry, for the sake of the view enjoyed by race horses.

Mr Cutifani told the Newcastle Herald yesterday the company had agreed to "sterilise" 53 million tonnes of coal worth \$5 billion and cut 10 years from the mine's life to accommodate the studs.

"I am not sure what else you can do. I'm flabbergasted," he said.

Mr Cutifani said the approvals process for the \$500-million Drayton South project had continued for four years and the company had done as much as it could.

The Hunter Thoroughbred Breeders Association opposes the project because it is "incompatible" with international breeding enterprises.

If approved the project would extend opposite two of Australia's largest studs, the influential Coolmore and Darley Woodlands.

Mr Cutifani addressed the Minerals Council of Australia in Canberra last night, where he warned the mining industry was becoming uncompetitive and "disconnected" from the political process.

He also blamed complex planning laws for causing extended delays to projects.

Mr Cutifani said his company wanted to work with the thoroughbred industry to enable them to co-exist. The company wanted to create a diverse economy in the Hunter Valley.

A Department of Planning and Infrastructure spokesman said it was continuing to discuss the issues with Anglo American.

It was Mr Cutifani's first visit to Australia since his appointment as chief executive in April.