

Queen's man warns coal a threat to equine reputation

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JOHN LEHMANN

THE Queen's most trusted horse racing manager says the Hunter Valley's reputation as a "rare international gem" for horse-breeding was being endangered by the "terrifying" spread of coal mines in the area.

"It was totally shocked when I travelled by helicopter across the Hunter — the visual impacts, the pollution . . . it's terrifying," John Warren told The Daily Telegraph yesterday, while sizing up horse flesh at the Gold Coast's Magic Millions sale.

Mr Warren warned discerning international horse owners would reconsider sending prized thoroughbreds to the Hunter if coal mines continued to spread closer to leading studs such as Coolmore and Darley.

"If China takes off those owners won't want to be in Australia — they'll want to be in New Zealand. You shouldn't shoot yourself in the foot," he said.

Mr Warren, who has acted as Queen Elizabeth's bloodstock and racing manager for 12 years, said he was in Australia to consider whether to bring the Queen's champion thoroughbred Al Kazeem to the Hunter.

He said the Hunter was one of the three greatest horse-breeding areas in the world, along with Kentucky and England's Newmarket: "The (NSW) government should be aware of just how special this place is."