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EXPANDED BUYING PROGRAM BOOSTS OPPORTUNITIES FOR REGIONAL BUSINESSES

BHP Billiton Coal has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting small businesses in the Bowen Basin and Mackay by opening up new opportunities for them to work with BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) and BHP Billiton Mitsui Coal (BMC).

The successful BHP Billiton Local Buying Program has been expanded to enable any business with less than 25 full-time employees based in the Central Highlands Regional Council, Isaac Regional Council or Mackay Local Government Areas to register to work with any BMA and BMC site.

Since the program's inception in 2012, BMA and BMC operations have spent more than \$60 million on goods and services from local small to medium-sized businesses and more than 652 businesses are currently registered with the program.

BMA Asset President Rag Udd said expanding the program meant it would now be easier for more local businesses to bid for work with Australia's largest exporter of seaborne metallurgical coal.

"We have listened and are responding to feedback from business owners who said they wanted it expanded. We are now creating more opportunities for small businesses to secure work with our operations," Mr Udd said.

The Local Buying Program ensures participating businesses have greater visibility to BMA and BMC users through an exclusive online supplier directory, increased opportunity to quote for work and shorter payment times for successful suppliers. Registering to participate in the program is free.

Expansion of the Local Buying Program is also increasing the reach of the associated Local Buying Community Foundation that supports local business development.

A percentage of every transaction completed through the Local Buying Program is invested in Foundation initiatives to build the resilience and capability of local suppliers. More than \$800,000 has been invested in the Foundation to date.

The program is based around commercial principles, and requires suppliers to remain competitive to secure work but businesses registered under the program are not guaranteed work.

The program's eligibility criteria was previously restricted to small businesses based in Blackwater, Capella, Dysart, Emerald, Moranbah and Nebo servicing BMA operations in the Bowen Basin and businesses in Mackay registering for work at the Hay Point coal export terminal. BMC operations, Poitrel and South Walker Creek, have been open to trade with businesses from both regions since joining the program in 2013.

The Local Buying Program is administered by Mackay-based entity C-Res, which is responsible for coordinating day-to-day running of the program and liaising with local suppliers. Businesses interested in registering with the Local Buying Program can visit www.localbuying.com.au

Further information on BHP Billiton can be found at: **bhpbilliton.com**

Contact:

Matthew Martyn Jones 0419 418 394

Kester Hubbard 0408 727 261