

Toxic waste dam 'shows flaws in act'

Committee hears mining ban submissions

By Paul Gregory

THAMES — Problems with a toxic-waste dam near Waihi show the Resource Management Act is incapable of protecting the Coromandel Peninsula from the harmful effects of mining and special legislation is necessary, a parliamentary select committee has heard.

But a pro-mining group, citing Department of Conservation research, said the peninsula was more in need of protection from goats, pigs and gorse than mining.

The planning and development committee met in Thames yesterday to hear some of more than 2500 submissions on a proposed mining ban on land on the Coromandel

Peninsula and Hauraki Gulf islands that is owned by the department.

Several local environmental groups, including Coromandel Watchdog, told the committee that the Resource Management Act and the Crown Mineral Act were inadequate protection for peninsula conservation land.

The spokesman for Coromandel Watchdog, Mr Denis Tegg, said compliance with those acts had failed to prevent problems, including deep-seated earth movement at the waste dam for the Golden Cross mine near Waihi.

The movement under the dam, which Mr Tegg said held the equivalent of eight years' worth of heavy industrial waste from the Auckland region, has caused widespread con-

cern about its stability.

Mr Tegg's and other submissions said the steepness of the terrain, its vulnerability to earthquakes and the heavy downpours common on the peninsula made it unsuitable for mining — and particularly for large waste dams.

Mr Tegg said the Thames-Coromandel and Hauraki district councils had ruled out putting rubbish dumps in the same area as the mine dam for those reasons.

The chairman of the Coromandel Mining Association, Mr Keith Hay, said the acts already in place offered more than adequate protection for conservation land against mining.

Citing a department document, Mr Hay said it had rated goats, opos-

sums, domestic stock and gorse as more of a threat than mining.

He said less than 25 per cent of the department's land on the peninsula was set aside for conservation purposes and, of that, he estimated less than 1 per cent would ever be affected by mining.

A spokesman for the local Federated Farmers, Mr Ross Goudie, said farmers and other land-users feared a mining ban could set a precedent for activities being banned without their effects, in individual instances, being assessed.

The committee was told that an act banning mining would save community groups from having to pay large amounts of money to oppose mining-related applications — sometimes more than once — through legal action.

Today the hearing will include submissions from the mining companies.