

MID WEST IRON ORE INDUSTRY ADVOCATING 'BALANCED AND RESPONSIBLE' DEVELOPMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL OFF-SET PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE RARE PLANT SPECIES

The Mid West iron ore industry was advocating balanced and responsible development which was designed to protect and enhance rare plant species in the region, not wipe them out as suggested by the Environmental Protection Authority in a media release yesterday, the Chairman of the Geraldton Iron Ore Alliance, Clive Brown, said today.

In its media statement, the EPA claimed that "...the balance (of the species *Darwinia masonii* and *Lepidosperma* sp. Mt Gibson) would be lost and the species would become extinct if adjoining areas were also mined."

"This is, in fact, the complete opposite of what Mount Gibson Iron Ltd and indeed the industry as a whole is advocating," Mr Brown said. "Mount Gibson Iron, as part of its environmental approval application, proposed to set up and fully fund an environmental group to research preservation and propagation of both plant species. This group would work closely with the Botanical Parks Authority as part of the proposal package which has been developed in close consultation with, and endorsed by, the EPA."

"Both Mount Gibson and the broader industry are committed to achieving sound environmental, economic and social outcomes from the development of the iron ore industry in the Mid West region," he added.

Under conditions endorsed by the EPA, the company is required to fully fund and manage the work to:

"Offset the direct impacts of the proposal (to mine) on the local (plant) population of the species by regeneration, re-establishment or translocation of additional plants or subpopulations on suitable un-impacted areas of banded ironstone formations in the Mt Gibson area..."

"As an industry, we believe it is possible to achieve these outcomes – and this belief seems to be shared by the EPA," Mr Brown said. "In fact, work already done by the Botanical Parks Authority shows that a trial reintroduction of *Darwinia masonii* resulted in 209 of 211 plants grown from cuttings doing well in another area that will not be impacted by mining."

"It seems incongruous that large tracts of land need to be placed into "A" Class reserves to preserve certain species of plants if the research and development undertaken by mining companies, supervised by the EPA/DEC, appears to show that it is possible for the species to survive and thrive in a non-mining location," he added.

Mr Brown said the second issue of concern was that the EPA appeared to be trying to downplay the significance it has given to "floristic communities", saying in the statement yesterday that the debate seemed to be focusing on the "secondary issue" of "Threatened Ecological Communities".

"To the casual observer, these two terms appear to mean the same thing, but they do not," Mr Brown said. "Floristic communities are not necessarily 'threatened' or even contain 'threatened' species, and they occur on all landforms, not just banded iron formations. There is no published Western Australian standard on floristic communities and no standard for measuring or assessing the environmental values of one floristic community over another.

"What is surprising about the EPA media statement is the view that "Threatened Ecological Communities" is a secondary issue," he said. "The floristic communities appear to be a major issue in the EPA Bulletin which has recommended large areas of granted Mining Leases be set aside in an 'A' Class reserve to preserve these communities.

"If they are to be treated as a secondary matter, that is something the Alliance will bring to the attention of the Appeals Convenor and the Minister for the Environment," Mr Brown said.

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