



Mid West Community Attitudes toward the Iron Ore Industry

Conducted for the Geraldton Iron Ore Alliance

WHY CONDUCT RESEARCH?

The Mid West region of WA is now recognised as having significant resource potential. Member companies within the Geraldton Iron Ore Alliance (GIOA) have already identified very large reserves of iron ore, enough for a 20-year-plus industry – and the region is still only lightly explored. We believe there is more iron ore to be found, as well as other minerals. The region is the second fastest growing iron ore producing area in Australia, and over the next decade, could be contributing exports of 50-60 million tonnes per annum of iron ore.

The GIOA, which represents a number of companies who are developing projects in the Mid West, commissioned this research to establish a reliable measure of the community's attitude toward large-scale development in the region. The research was aimed at understanding how the development would impact people's lives, feelings and future, and provide an avenue for the community to raise any issues we need to be aware of.

ABOUT GIOA

The GIOA has expanded to include seven companies, each of which is exploring, developing or expanding its iron ore projects in the Mid West. The members are:

- Mount Gibson Iron Limited
- Midwest Corporation Limited
- Murchison Metals Ltd
- Gindalbie Metals Ltd
- Golden West Resources Limited
- Royal Resources Limited
- Asia Iron Holdings Limited

The GIOA was formed to allow member companies to cooperate in all key areas of the industry's development, with particular focus on infrastructure, statutory approvals and Government/community relations.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The research was undertaken by a professional and highly regarded research organisation, Patterson Market Research. Patterson's commenced operations in 1984, and created the regular telephone omnibus service "Flashpoll", part of which has been published every month since then as "WestPoll" by The West Australian newspaper.

The Company interviewed more than 300 people living in 18 local government areas in the Mid-West. This included the city of Geraldton-Greenough and the shires of Carnamah, Chapman Valley, Coorow, Cue, Irwin, Meekatharra, Mingenew, Morawa, Mt Magnet, Mullewa, Murchison, Northampton, Perenjori, Sandstone, Three Springs, Wiluna and Yalgoo.

Patterson's interviewed what is referred to as a "statistically reliable sample", which is deemed accurately reflect the views within the whole population. The people interviewed were randomly selected, then "qualified" by the interviewers to ensure, as best as possible, that the collective sample was a fair representation of the characteristics and demographics of the region.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted by Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI). The survey and questions were designed by Patterson's to be open ended and unprompted, and specifically to provide survey residents with an opportunity to raise their views and issues.

To provide a reliable assessment of community opinions about the Mid West Iron Ore industry for the Geraldton and regional township communities of the Midwest, the research included a quota managed random dial survey of 152 adults from Geraldton and 152 from the mining affected regions of the Midwest. The resultant significant over-sampling of the regions was corrected to provide a balanced measure of the opinions of the total Midwest community. The data for the total survey has a theoretical sample error of +/- 5.7%. The data for Geraldton and the regions separately has a survey error of +/- 8%.

OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

Key results and outcomes of the survey included the following:

- 87% of the Mid-West population believe the economic flow-on from iron-ore mining will be important for the region.
- 81% think it will have a positive impact (only 7% disagree).

Some of the benefits identified by the community, as a result of the developing iron ore industry, included:

- Direct employment opportunities,
- Positive flow on effects to other business,
- Retention of young people in the region,
- Training programs,
- Employment opportunities for Indigenous people and
- Helping make rural communities more sustainable
- Better Facilities and infrastructure.

A small minority felt mining would have a negative impact, identifying dust as the biggest potential issue. Other concerns raised included increased truck traffic and effects on flora and fauna.

When asked to look at all the positive and negative impact together, and then say if they supported or opposed expansion of the Mid West iron ore industry, 82% supported it and only 9% said they were opposed (the balance had no opinion).

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The research identified a particularly high level of support, which GIOA and Patterson's believe means the people of the Mid West have a clear and realistic understanding of the implications of increased iron ore mining. There appears to be recognition that increased mining offers the Mid West a number of economic and social advantages, from an industry that is not seasonal (especially important in the agricultural, fishing and tourism parts of the region).

The research identified only a low level of environmental concern. This is interpreted as indicating an above-average understanding that mining does not have a widespread impact on the environment, and the fact that more than half the sample (56%) was confident that the environmental issues associated with the mining industry can be managed "to acceptable levels".

CONCLUSION

The overview of community attitudes towards iron ore sector is that the great majority of surveyed residents have very positive attitudes towards the industry, anticipating significant positive effects emanating from its development in the Mid West. There is recognition that there will be some environmental issues to be managed, but more than half believe these can be managed "to acceptable levels".

It is the view of the GIOA that the economic benefits of mining development in the Mid West are generally well recognised and accepted.