



\$50b of iron ore at risk in EPA ruling

KIM MACDONALD

Uncertainty surrounds more than \$50 billion of Mid-West iron ore after a recommendation from the environmental watchdog that would stop exploration leases from being allowed to progress to the mining stage in a neighbouring region.

The Geraldton Iron Ore Alliance claims the region has \$62 billion worth of iron ore locked up in a unique type of hilly ranges which the Environmental Protection Authority moved to protect in an adjoining region this week.

But alliance spokesman Rob Jefferies said most of the deposits found in the environmentally sensitive banded ironstone formation ranges were in Mid-West areas which were under exploration leases and which had not yet secured mining approval.

Mr Jefferies feared the exploration lease may never progress to the mining stage after the EPA advised against allowing such scope in its recommendation on the ironstone ranges and surrounding land at Mt Manning in the Yilgarn.

In its decision to expand the Mt Manning A-class reserve and conservation park, existing mining tenements would be allowed to continue but about 50 per cent of the proposed reserve, which is covered by exploration leases, would not be allowed to progress to the



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MINING SPOKESMAN ROB JEFFERIES

mining stage. Mr Jefferies said this was unfair because mining companies committed significant financial resources in the exploration stage.

"What it means is that if we can't build on the potential of these exploration leases, this \$62 billion over 25 years will not become a reality," Mr Jefferies said.

He said the recent decision, on top of a similar decision to protect banded ironstone formations at Mt Gibson in the Mid-West, added to concerns about the EPA's strong view on mining the unique terrain which runs through the Mid-West and Wheatbelt regions.

EPA deputy chairwoman Andrea Hinwood said this week that the Mt Manning recommendation was testimony to the unique flora and fauna in the ranges.

Her comments were welcomed by the Conservation Council.

Mining projects in the Mid-West include the Mt Gibson Iron project at Tallering Peak, east of Geraldton, and at Murchison Metals at Jack Hills, north-west of Meekatharra. Midwest Corporation is removing and exporting old stockpiles of iron ore fines from Koolanooka, south-east of Geraldton.

There are several proposals for larger scale iron ore mining projects in the Mid-West, including those by Mt Gibson Iron and Sinomat Extension Hill, near Paynes Find, Gindalbie Metals at Karara, south-east of Geraldton, Murchison Metals at Jack Hills and Midwest Corporation at both Koolanooka and Weld Range, south-west of Meekatharra.

The only current mining of iron ore in the Yilgarn is Portman Limited at Koolyanobbing and its northern tenements at Windarling and Mt Jackson.