



Tenders to be released shortly

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THE long-awaited Oakajee Port race is set to start this week.

Planning and Infrastructure Minister Alannah MacTiernan is expected to release tenders for the \$3 billion Oakajee Port in the next few days.

The announcement will come after more than a year of turmoil over the port and associated rail network, which has been labelled as vital in getting the Mid West iron ore industry off the ground.

Originally two Mid West iron ore miners, Murchison Metals and Midwest Corporation, planned to build the port together, 24km north of Geraldton.

However, last year when companies failed to come to an agreement over the infrastructure, the Minister turned Oakajee into a competitive tendering process.

The Government's "request for proposal" documents for Oakajee will go out to the two

nominated infrastructure providers, Oakajee Port and Rail and Yilgarn Infrastructure.

OPR, jointly owned by iron ore miner Murchison Metals and Mitsubishi Development, is competing against Yilgarn, which is backed by fellow miner Midwest to build the new port.

Millions of dollars have been spent on environmental, feasibility and seismic studies by both port hopefuls. Geraldton householders will receive a letter from OPR this week.

In a bid to increase its public profile, OPR's letter details its bid to build the port and says the Mid West will have increased employment opportunities and growth if the port goes ahead.

Yilgarn was also in Geraldton last week, meeting with the Morawa and Chapman Valley Shires over the Oakajee Port development.

The port debate has been ongoing since the days of Mid

West iron ore hopeful Kingstream, which planned to build a port and steel mill at the Oakajee River mouth.

However, the proposed port, which had gained the support of the Government at the time, failed to come to fruition when Kingstream went into administration in 2001, the year the State Liberals lost Government.

Oakajee has been labelled as vital to unlocking the Mid West iron industry to the global market and has been used as a political football between State and Federal Governments.

"The Oakajee Port and a regional Mid West rail system are crucial to enable the iron ore industry to expand and to facilitate the economic growth of the Mid West region," Yilgarn's chief executive Andrew Carter told the *Geraldton Guardian*.