



Alliance hope for mining balance

ANDREW PASCOE

A SPARK of hope has risen out of the controversial Extension Hill decision through a plan for shires including Morawa and Perenjori to form an alliance with environmental watchdog the Conservation Council.

Environment Minister David Templeman announced last week that he would approve iron ore miner Mt Gibson's Extension Hill project but quarantine part of the surrounding Mt Gibson Range, raising serious concerns that struggling towns would have their chance to capitalise on the mining boom steamrolled by conservation efforts.

But a meeting between the Wildflower Country Regional Council and Conservation Council director Chris Tallentire has raised the possibility of Mid West towns working with the Council to secure a social investment

while preserving the environment.

Morawa Shire chief executive Gavin Treasure said it was important for towns caught up in the mining boom to form bonds with environmental ambassadors as well as mining companies.

"We're looking for a balanced approach. We're frustrated because the social considerations are not being given any standing in the debate, compared to the very high profile discussion of environmental and economic issues," he said.

"So it's very much in our interest to form closer ties with both mining companies and environmental bodies like the Conservation Council."

Perenjori Shire chief executive Stan Scott said more ground could be made by the Council and shires "working together, rather than against each other", while Mr Tallentire said he thought the two interests went "hand in

hand".

"The shires will benefit from protecting the environment surrounding them. We have to make sure there is a strong investment to the region so there are long-lasting benefits to the community as a result of mining, and at the same time ensure environmental features are preserved," Mr Tallentire said.

Mr Tallentire said talks of an alliance may be followed up in the near future by a joint meeting in the Mid West to see what "common ground" was shared by the parties.

Geraldton Iron Ore Alliance spokesperson Rob Jefferies said one of the most disappointing aspects of the Extension Hill decision was its failure to discuss the social implications of the decision.

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"Pretty much every local government across the Mid West expressed concern about EPA's approach regarding A-class reserves in the appeals process; and certainly the Minister's decision contains no discussion of how the social implications of iron ore mining will be dealt with by Government," he said.

"I think it's disappointing. These communities raised strong and real concerns and they should have been given

the courtesy of being answered."

Mr Jefferies also said the report raised doubts about the likelihood of the Government's strategic review into the Mid West iron ore industry ensuring there was a social dividend.

"Is this report a taste of what approach the strategic review will take? Will it resolve the questions this report on Mt Gibson raises or will generate more questions

than answers?" he said.

More than a week since Mr Templeman's decisions were announced, widespread uncertainty remains among the Mid West iron ore industry.

Asia Iron general manager Peter Jones warned Minister Templeman's decision, which will quarantine tenements owned by the company and Mt Gibson, would not be isolated.

"It's something that's going to happen for all the other miners, we're just the starters," he said.