



Mid-West miners fear new environment bans

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Mid-West iron ore miners fear for the future of their \$62 billion industry after mining was banned this week at most of the Mt Gibson range in a bid to protect rare plant life which grows through the region.

The Geraldton Iron-ore Alliance was concerned the State Government had set a precedent which puts flora before mining and which could lead to widespread bans in the Mid-West.

Spokesman Rob Jefferies said mining companies were nervous about a coming governmental report which is expected to indicate which areas would be quarantined from developments through the creation of new conservation parks.

The review, by the Department of Conservation and the Department of Industry and Resources, will look at the environmental, social and economic effects of mining in the banded

ironstone formation ranges.

The ranges are mineral-rich but environmentally sensitive because they sustain unique and rare flora and fauna that is heavily protected by the Environmental Protection Authority.

The EPA last May called for a conservation park to be set up at nearby Mt Manning, which effectively banned mining, in a bid to protect the formations.

Mr Jefferies said it was important for the review to provide certainty to the industry, because current fears had the potential to stall investment.

There are high hopes the region will become the State's latest mining frontier and the next biggest iron ore producer after the Pilbara.

The concerns were backed by Association of Mining and Exploration Companies spokesman Ian Loftus, who said the Mt Gibson decision did nothing to address the long-term sustainability of the Mid-West's iron

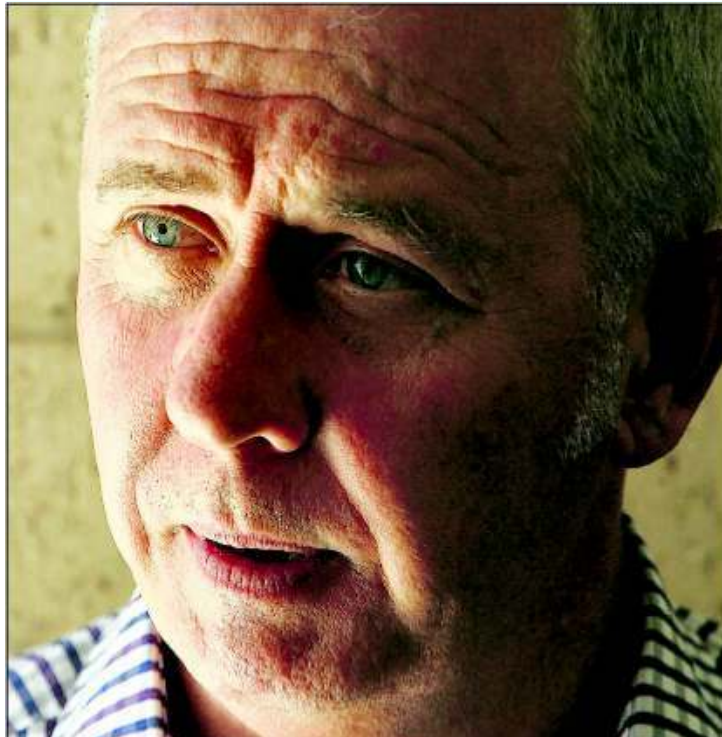
ore potential.

The Mt Gibson ruling will allow a new iron ore mine east of Geraldton, but will protect most of the surrounding range and create two A-class reserves.

"It lets the Mt Gibson proposal through but leaves every other project in the Mid-West up in the air, making this State look like a very risky place for investors," Mr Loftus said.

But Environment Minister David Templeman and Industry and Enterprise Minister Fran Logan said the decision should not be taken as a precedent for the remaining banded ironstone formations in the Mid-West.

"I am satisfied I have made a decision that will allow industry to continue to mine and explore this resource-rich region without compromising the environment and these rare species of flora," Mr Templeman said.



Challenge: Industry and Enterprise Minister Fran Logan said the decision should not be taken as a precedent for other formations. Picture: Trevor Collens