



EPA Bulletin: 1063

THE HON DR JUDY EDWARDS (MLA)
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Dear Minister

PLANS FOR BAUXITE MINING, AND ROAD AND CONVEYOR STREAM CROSSINGS IN CAR INFORMAL RESERVES, MINING LEASE 1SA: ALCOA OF AUSTRALIA

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the Environmental Protection Authority's (EPA) advice on the above plans under Section 16(e) of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*. This advice will also be made publicly available as per normal protocol.

The EPA's recommendations are on page 3 of this letter.

1. Introduction and background

The Commonwealth of Australia and the State of Western Australia signed the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) on 4 May 1999. The RFA established a system of Formal and Informal Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserves. Such Reserves are located throughout the area defined as the RFA boundary, and some are within Alcoa of Australia's Mining Lease (ML) 1SA. The RFA process provides for disturbance of CAR Informal Reserves subject to relevant State approval processes.

As I outlined to you in previous advice¹ (copy at Attachment A), in 2001 the EPA developed, in consultation with Alcoa, the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) and the then Department of Resources Development, a process to review plans by Alcoa to disturb CAR Informal Reserves in Mining Lease 1SA. This process is consistent with the requirements of the RFA and the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*.

¹ EPA (2001). 'Plans for bauxite mining and haul road stream crossing in CAR Informal Reserves, ML 1SA: Alcoa of Australia (advice under s16(e) of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*), Bulletin 1015'.

On 30 April 2002, Alcoa submitted plans (“the Plans”) to the Mining and Management Programme Liaison Group¹ (MMPLG) to disturb a total of 5.5 hectares of vegetation within four CAR Informal Reserves, as part of ongoing bauxite mining and infrastructure development at its Huntly and Willowdale mines. A detailed biological assessment was also submitted for each CAR Informal Reserve to be disturbed.

The ‘CAR Informal Reserves Evaluation Committee’, which includes a representative from the Conservation Council of Western Australia², has considered the Plans in the first instance. Following the Committee’s detailed review of the Plans, and site visit to the relevant areas in May 2002, the Committee recommended to the MMPLG that Alcoa be granted approval to clear the CAR Informal Reserves as proposed. The MMPLG has endorsed this advice in a letter to the EPA (see Attachment B). This process is consistent with the agreed process referred to above.

2. Environmental acceptability of the Plans

The EPA notes that:

- Three out of the four CAR Informal Reserves affected by the Plans occur as linear stream reserves; the fourth Reserve is located in open jarrah woodland, not adjacent to a watercourse;
- Alcoa commissioned consultants to carry out vegetation, rare flora and fauna, heritage and dieback studies for each of the four CAR Informal Reserve affected by the Plans, and modified the plans in accordance with recommendations made by its consultants so as to reduce the environmental impacts;
- the Plans will not affect any rare or endangered flora and fauna, or any Threatened Ecological Communities recognised at the State or National level;
- no heritage sites occur in the affected areas;
- any occurrences of dieback within or adjacent to the affected areas can be appropriately managed by Alcoa;
- the vegetation affected by the bauxite mining is considered to be well represented in the conservation estate;
- an acceptable vegetation buffer will be retained between the clearing line for the bauxite mining and the existing dampland vegetation;

¹ The MMPLG, which was established by the State in 1979, oversees environmental aspects of Alcoa’s mining operations in ML 1SA. The Group has representatives from Alcoa, the Department of Environmental Protection, Water and Rivers Commission, Water Corporation, Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources and CALM.

² The CAR Informal Reserves Evaluation Committee is a sub-committee of the MMPLG, comprising members of the Mining Operations Group, which comprises representatives of Alcoa, the Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources, CALM and Water Corporation, plus a representative of the Conservation Council of WA. The MMPLG uses the CAR Informal Reserves Evaluation Committee to review any plans by Alcoa to disturb CAR Informal Reserves in ML 1SA, and to report its findings to the MMPLG.

- Alcoa will aim to rehabilitate the mining areas to a jarrah forest ecosystem as per the rehabilitation prescriptions established in the Alcoa/CALM Working Arrangements³, and will return the stream crossings to natural levels and use a tailored seed mix to return species that are typical of stream zone vegetation; and
- relevant representatives from CALM, Water Corporation, Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources and Conservation Council of WA reviewed the Plans, conducted a site inspection and subsequently recommended that the Plans be approved.

Given the above, the EPA considers that the Plans do not impose an unacceptable impact on the environment.

3. Recommendations

The EPA recommends to the Minister for Environment and Heritage that:

1. The Minister notes the EPA's conclusion that the Plans by Alcoa to disturb 5.5 ha of vegetation within four CAR Informal Reserves in ML 1SA do not impose an unacceptable impact on the environment.
2. The Minister accepts the EPA advice that the disturbance of four CAR Informal Reserves in Alcoa's ML 1SA does not impose an unacceptable impact on the environment, and advises the Minister for State Development accordingly.

If you approve the above recommendations, you may care to approve the attached draft letter to the Minister for State Development.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Bowen
CHAIRMAN

19 August 2002

Atts

[*Web copy* - The attachments mentioned in this advice are available from the Department of Environmental Protection Library Information Centre]

³ The Working Arrangements, which are prepared by Alcoa and CALM, contain processes and procedures on how Alcoa and CALM operate within State Forest, and are reviewed bi-annually. The Arrangements cover issues such as forest hygiene, logging protocols, dieback identification protocols and reporting of any rare or endangered flora and fauna species.