



Environmental Protection Authority

Westralia Square,
141 St Georges Terrace, Perth, Western Australia 6000.
Telephone: (08) 9222 7000. Facsimile: (08) 9222 7155.

Postal Address: PO Box K822,
Perth, Western Australia 6842.
Website: www.epa.wa.gov.au

Dr Judy Edwards MLA
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

EPA Bulletin 1127

Dear Minister

Newcrest Mining Limited, Telfer Project, Power Supply and Infrastructure Corridor, Port Hedland to Telfer Gold Mine, Great Sandy Desert - Change to Environmental Conditions

In your letter dated 15 March 2004, you requested the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to consider and provide advice under Section 46(1) of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (EP Act) on the implementation of Newcrest Limited's (Newcrest) approved Telfer Project, Power Supply and Infrastructure Corridor, Port Hedland to Telfer Gold Mine, Great Sandy Desert.

This project includes the construction of a 440 kilometre (km) gas pipeline from Port Hedland to the Newcrest Telfer Gold mine. The project was assessed by the EPA in August 2002 under assessment number 1444 (Bulletin 1058). The Proposal was approved by the Minister for the Environment on 1 October 2002 in Statement 605. The approval was based on the length of open trench being no greater than 5 km. The project is currently underway and it is expected that pipeline construction will be completed in April 2004.

The advice set out below constitutes The EPA's report pursuant to Section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act 1986 (EP Act).

Background

In November 2003, following a request from the proponent, the Department of Environment (DoE) recommended the EPA approve an increase in the open trench length from 5 km to 60km with an increase in the nominated rate of construction from 4 km per day to 6 km per day and an increase in the duration of open trench from one week to 10-15 days.

This approval was granted subject to the implementation of *the Power Supply & Infrastructure Corridor Open Trench Modification Proposal (Newcrest 2003)*. The change was considered a non-substantial change because Newcrest's proposed management measures were considered appropriate to prevent native fauna from being trapped in the trenches and ensured that the extended length of trench would be maintained daily by fauna clearing crews. It was also contended that the reduction of time to complete the trench from 7 months to 4 months would have a net environmental benefit.

Subsequently, the DoE was advised by the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the Department of Industry and Resources (DOIR) of the high level of fauna mortality occurring in the open trench and in response, conducted a site audit of the Telfer pipeline project on 11 February 2004. The DoE found the high level of fauna mortality from the open trench was unacceptable (average 57 % between 03/02/04 to 11/02/04) and evidence that the proponent was not complying with all environmental management commitments.

Evaluation

The EPA has considered whether the conditions in Ministerial Statement 605 are adequate to achieve the EPA's objectives and whether the existing approved length of open trench of 60 km meets the EPA's environmental objective to maintain the abundance, diversity,

geographic distribution and productivity of flora and fauna at species and ecosystem levels through the avoidance or management of adverse impacts and improvement in knowledge.

The EPA considers that the proponent has been unable to adequately manage the impact on the biodiversity of the area with an open trench of 60 km and recommends that this should be reduced to the standard industry practice of 20 km, as advised by DOIR. In addition, the EPA considered that the approved 30 km of further open trench in rocky terrain be reduced to 10 km and that the length of time the trench is open be reduced from 15 to 7 days.

The recommended change to environmental conditions will reduce the length of open trench permitted for the approved project from 60 km to 20 km and accordingly reduce the level of fauna mortality experienced during the construction of the pipeline. The proposed changes recommended in this document will not impact any other relevant environmental factors identified in EPA Bulletin 1058.

Recommendation

The EPA, at its meeting of Thursday 11 March 2004, having considered the proponent's existing commitments and the information provided in the DoE audit report, recommends that a new condition be imposed to reduce fauna impacts from construction of the pipeline, as follows:

8 Fauna Management (Open Trench)

8-1 The proponent shall not maintain in excess of twenty kilometres of open trench at any one time, except when excavating in "rocky terrain" where an additional ten kilometres of open trench is permitted, to the requirements of the Minister for the Environment on advice of the Environmental Protection Authority.

8-2 No part of the trench shall remain open for longer than seven days, with the exception of trench in "rocky terrain" which shall not remain open for longer than 15 days.

8-3 Not less than six full-time "fauna clearing crews" shall be employed to remove fauna from the trench.

8-4 The full length of open trench shall be cleared by the "fauna clearing crews" at least once each day before 10am.

Definitions:

(1) "Rocky terrain" means areas in the infrastructure corridor which contain material that is too hard to be excavated with the bucket-wheel trenchers and requires drilling and/or blasting of rock.

(2) "Fauna clearing crews" means employees whose responsibility is to daily walk the open trench to recover and record fauna found within the open trench".

NB: In matters regarding fauna in the above conditions, the proponent shall liaise with CALM.

All other existing environmental conditions and commitments will remain unchanged.

Yours sincerely



Walter Cox
CHAIRMAN

18 March 2004