

PNG to stop Kokoda Trail mine

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The Papua New Guinea Government is set to block a proposed mine that might have destroyed part of the Kokoda Trail on environmental grounds, not because of Australia's concerns about the history of the trail, local landowners say.

The news comes as a poll shows most West Australians back the proposal to mine a section of the trail, providing the project has the full backing of the PNG people and is a real benefit to them.

PNG landholders' representative Barney Jack told *The West Australian* yesterday that the PNG Government would block the mine because it might pollute water that could be used to supply Port Moresby.

Mr Jack said landowners who would have benefited from a mine would instead be offered a multi-million dollar development package from the PNG Government for schools, an airstrip and other infrastructure.

His claim that the mine would not be allowed to go ahead was backed by

Kokoda Track Authority director Warren Bartlett, who said an official announcement would be made soon.

Talk that the mine had been killed off came as a surprise to the company pushing the project, Frontier Resources. Managing director Peter McNeil said he had spoken to local landowners recently and had heard nothing of the kind.

Mr Jack said he hoped that some kind of financial package would be given to his firm by the PNG Government as compensation for exploration work.

He said the plight of landowners would never have been acknowledged by the PNG or Australian governments if it had not been for the mining company campaigning for their right to mine the land.

Mr Bartlett said landowners had also agreed to re-open the trail to trekkers, lifting a blockade imposed in protest at the Australian and PNG governments' opposition to the mine.

The company wanted to mine a small section of the 94km trail on

which Diggers famously fought back the Japanese during World War II.

The Rudd Government initially opposed the plan, but then appeared to ease its objections after experts suggested that the section to be mined was not part of the original trail.

The Returned and Services League backed the mine, saying the best thing Australia could do for the descendants of the so-called Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels who helped wounded Diggers along the trail was to not stand in the way of the development of their economy.

A Westpoll conducted last week of 408 people found six out of 10 said the mine should be allowed to go ahead, providing it brought economic benefits to locals. Respondents were told that a Perth-based company wanted to mine a section of the Kokoda Trail and that the project might provide financial security for locals.

Liberal and Green voters were more likely to support the mine than Labor voters. Support for the project was slightly softer in country areas.