

Heat on Premier over mining find

JESSICA STRUTT

Pressure was mounting on the State Government last night to intervene to protect a prehistoric dwelling found on the site of the Hope Downs iron ore mine, after it emerged Alan Carpenter granted conditional approval for mining.

Documents obtained by *The West Australian* reveal that in 2002 Mr Carpenter, then indigenous affairs minister, granted the mining company owned by Australia's richest woman, Gina Rinehart, permission to conduct open-pit mining on land containing 16 archaeological sites.

Mr Carpenter sent a letter to Hancock Prospecting director, Tad Watroba, signed February 20, 2002, approving use of the land subject to a number of conditions.

"I hereby grant consent to Hope Downs Iron Ore Pty Ltd to use the land containing 16 archaeological sites to conduct open-pit iron ore mining, and to construct associated infrastructure at the Hope Downs North and South Deposits," Mr Carpenter wrote. The mine is jointly owned by international mining giant Rio Tinto and Ms Rinehart's Hancock Prospecting.

Archaeologists hired by the traditional owners of the land have requested the companies permanently quarantine an area of the land from mining after the recent discovery of 35,000-year-old indigenous tools at the site.

Hancock Prospecting has offered a further section of the Rinehart family's station, Mulga Downs, to house the artefacts but has failed to respond to urgent calls for the per-

February 2002

I hereby grant consent to Hope Downs Iron Ore Pty Ltd to use the land containing 16 archaeological sites to conduct open pit iron ore mining and to construct associated infrastructure at the Hope Downs North and South Deposits.

ALAN CARPENTER



manent protection of the rock overhang and surrounding areas on the Hope Downs South mine where the discovery was made.

Slim Parker, an elder with the local Martidja Banyjima people, said yesterday he was yet to hear from Mr Carpenter or Rio Tinto.

"Alan Carpenter should stand up here in the light of reconciliation in regards to such a significant archaeological site in the interests of all West Australians and Australians," he said. "It's part of our history."

A spokeswoman for the Premier refused to comment on whether Mr Carpenter would step in or instruct his Indigenous Affairs Minister Michelle Roberts to intervene to ensure the site was protected.

She said the Department of Indigenous Affairs was awaiting a full report about the discovery of the artefacts and other research. The

final report would be submitted to DIA by January 31 next year.

Mr Carpenter's decision to grant conditional consent was based on an Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee recommendation.

The consent included a condition that a permit be issued to a qualified archaeologist to undertake further recording, research, excavation and analysis of several Aboriginal sites on the land. According to the documents, that archaeologist was commissioned by Hancock Prospecting.

The spokeswoman said that between 2002 and 2007, a company which manages Aboriginal heritage on the land, Pilbara Iron Pty Ltd, undertook several projects to comply with the conditional consent.

"It was during this time that further archaeological sites were discovered," she said.