

Bowler calls for Heritage Act review

By Mary Lynn Mather

GOLDFIELDS MP John Bowler has called on the new State Government to initiate a review of the Heritage Act.

He describes it as the biggest single impediment to the mining industry and believes it fails to protect genuine indigenous heritage sites.

Mr Bowler said some sectors of indigenous leadership in Western Australia would not want to see any changes to the legislation, especially those who made a living out of the Act.

At the same time he thought there would be many Aboriginal people who would welcome a change to make the administration more equitable.

"There is no doubt the Heritage Act as it operates at the moment is corrupt," former Federal Member for Kalgoorlie Graeme Campbell said.

He maintained the Act was "being hijacked by left-leaning white anthropologists" who saw it as "a milk cow for their continuing aggrandisement".

Mr Campbell said he had been approached by concerned Aboriginal people who maintained the Act was neither representative nor democratic and it impeded mining, which was not what they wanted to do.

Goldfields Land and Sea Council executive director Brian Wyatt pointed out the Act was designed primarily to protect Aboriginal heritage, rather than to facilitate development.

He said there needed to be "strong enough legislation" to indicate the heritage would be protected before considering any interaction.

As an example, Mr Wyatt cited the Burrup case where "world pristine rock art could not be protected" under the Act, meaning "development ultimately got its way".

Mr Bowler indicated he would seek

an overall review of all processes and procedures facing prospectors and exploration companies to help cut the red and green tape "strangling the mining industry".

Executive officer of indigenous affairs at the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia, Cara Babb, said the CME was keen to work with the new State Government and Department of Indigenous Affairs.

"We believe that better administration of the Act would improve efficiency of the process and increase confidence that the system protects Aboriginal Heritage while providing certainty for resources companies," she said. "In particular, there is a fundamental need for better resourcing in this area to ensure the department is able to recruit and retain experienced heritage professionals who are able to provide quality advice and timely approvals."

Mr Bowler was aware controversy surrounded the topic and that political sensitivity was involved.

"Without pre-empting a review, there should be two basic aims of the new Act: to provide certainty for all land users in Western Australia and at the same time ensure proper protection for genuine heritage sites," he said.

"The current legislation does neither."

Mr Bowler added mining companies and prospectors were often frustrated by the Heritage Act and its lack of timelines.

Other land users, such as pastoralists, Government departments, local government and developers, would welcome the prospect of streamlining the processes under the Act and the introduction of timelines for all participants.