



National Opal Miners Association

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Government of South Australia
Mineral Resources Division
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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: THE FUTURE OF OPAL MINING AT MINTABIE

The National Opal Miners Association (NOMA) is a peak industry body that includes delegates from the opal miners associations of Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales.

The NOMA is aware through its South Australian delegates that the SA government is pursuing the closure of the Mintabie Precious Stone Field, and it is seeking the Premier's personal intervention to halt this process.

The proposed closure of the Mintabie Precious Stone Field and the abandonment of supporting small businesses by the SA government will be seen by the Australian Opal Industry (AOI) and the greater population as a failure of the Liberal government.

Other SA opal mining fields such as Coober Pedy, Andamooka and Lambina are naturally anxious and concerned about their future, given these regions are also experiencing similar problems raised in the Mintabie Report.

Should the Liberal State Government decide to mimic the former Labor government's decision to end the opal town's lease, the SA government's partisan actions will make a mockery of the Liberal party's election slogan of "A Strong Plan for Real Change" and expose it as nothing more than a shallow political jingle!

A strong plan for real change would be for the SA government to lead, not follow, by providing support for small scale miners ensuring the certainty that they deserve. A strong plan would also commit adequate policing to rid the Mintabie Precious Stone Field of any extraneous influences bought about by the former Labor Government's failure to provide the basic services to support regional development.

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This support would safely preserve the capital investment of Mintabie miners and supporting businesses from being continually vandalized which has led to decreased production and the need for further investment over the last 10 years.

The opal miners and small businesses that live and derive their income from the Mintabie Precious Stone Field deserve better from the SA government. They had actively attained support from their elected member prior to the SA 2018 election, now only to be seen to be duped by him and by the actions of the SA government which are being administered by the Minister for Mines and Energy, Mr Dan van Holst Pellekaan.

Evidence from the Department of Premier and Cabinet Opal Program confirms there is a high level of compliance by opal miners in Mintabie as no miners were taken to court for any breach of the opal mining act or regulations in 2016/2017.

This fact was conveniently overlooked by the authors of the Mintabie Report who recommended that the Minister for Mineral Resources and Energy assess the impacts of revoking the proclamation of the Mintabie Precious Stones Field, pursuant to section 4(2) of the Opal Mining Act 1995.

Findings and recommendations of the Mintabie Report, are apparently incompatible with statistical facts from the Department of Premier and Cabinet. One can only conclude from this evidence that there are perhaps other motives to ensure the demise of the Mintabie Precious Stones Field!

It is abhorrent that not one opal industry representative was invited to sit on the Mintabie Review Panel despite representation being available from either the Mintabie Miners and Progress Association, the South Australian Opal Miners Association and/or the NOMA.

The Mintabie Report is seen by NOMA and the AOI as a dubious smokescreen. The NOMA suspects it is about removing opal mining from Mintabie in favor of the numerous gas and petroleum exploration licenses and applications over the area.

The Mintabie Precious Stone Field is situated geologically on the Mintabie Escarpment/ anticline and is a prime location for exploration of oil and gas.

As the SA government is undoubtedly aware Indonesian company AHAVA Energy currently holds gas and petroleum exploration tenures over APY lands and will pay lucrative royalties to the State government and to the APY. The State will pass onto the APY a full one-third share of the 10% royalty received by it on the first 5000 barrels of each days production.

It appears most participants on the Mintabie Review Panel have a conflict of interest as they represent organisations or individuals which will receive lucrative benefits from the removal of Mintabie residents, businesses and the Mintabie Precious Stone Field.

The NOMA's legal advisors are seeking more details under Freedom of Information to further investigate Federal and State governments and the APY involvement in the Mintabie Report. The above parties appear at face value of being complicit and stand to gain from their decision to recommend the closure of this field.

The inconsistencies and the politics behind these motives requires proper investigation and should be referred to the SA Legislative Council and the Australian Senate given the involvement of this report from both levels of government.

Whilst the NOMA and the AOI ordinarily remain apolitical, given the questionable recommendations made by the Mintabie Report, any negative action by the SA government to remove any mining camps, mining operations or supporting businesses, will only enrage the AOI members and may well serve to be the catalyst for NOMA to yet again rally its members to assist in removing a State government whose directions are vehemently opposed to the aspirations of the AOI.

The NOMA could and would provide resources to assist returning SA Liberals to yet another 16 long years in the political wilderness. This could readily be achieved according to NOMA's recent analysis of South Australian state politics.

Whilst this is not NOMA's preferred option, the direction the SA government is taking towards revoking the proclamation of the Mintabie Precious Stone Field is reverberating through the nation's opal fields.

This ill-conceived precedent the SA government is now engaging to act upon would leave the NOMA with no other option.

The NOMA would sooner have the Premier's personal intervention in this matter to avoid this unnecessary conflict and act promptly to rectify this terrible mess it has inherited.

This could readily be facilitated by the Premier instructing the Minister for Energy and Mines to ensure the Mintabie Precious Stone Field has the certainty it deserves. This could be achieved by providing adequate policing to ensure miners are able to safely preserve their investments from the influences that are bringing this opal mining town into disrepute.

The Mintabie Precious Stone Field should not only be supported but promoted and extended preserving the future supply of this highly sought after uniquely South Australian gem.

The longevity of the opal endowment of the Mintabie Precious Stone Field has been confirmed according to a recent report to the SA Department of the Premier and Cabinet by Laszlo Katona, Principal Geoscientist, Geological Survey of SA. Mr Katona estimates the potential opal resource in Mintabie to be over \$3.6 billion in raw product.

The long-term support of the Mintabie Precious Stones Field and the reversal of the decision to close the township by the SA government would be a step in the right direction. The opal miners of SA and Australia are hopeful the Premier will take the opportunity to review and renew the SA government's direction which unfortunately to date has blindly followed the Labor party.

Now is the time to provide leadership and demonstrate there is an alternative way forward that ensures further opal mining investment for now and into the future in SA.

Yours sincerely,



Sebastian Deisenberger
President

c.c. The Honourable Steven Marshall, Premier of South Australia
 Dan van Holst Pellekaan, MP, Minister for Energy and Mining SA
 Former Senator, Nick Xenophon