

Dept of Energy and Mining
SA Govt.
Adelaide SA.

Al Lad



For the attention of the Committee reviewing the Future of the MPSF.

Statement of Al Lad re: Mintabie Precious Stones Field (MPSF) 17th September 2018

On 23rd July 2018 Govt. representatives including Mr Sam Walker and Ms Melissa Muller visited Mintabie to meet with residents regarding the Govt.'s decision to surrender the Mintabie Township Lease under Section 5.5 of the Mintabie Lease.

Those in attendance were highly critical of the reason given for the Govt.'s decision to close an established opal town of 40 years. They were also scathing of the 2017 Mintabie Review process which they believe showed gross bias against Mintabie and its' people.

Those in attendance couldn't understand how an active mining town still providing top quality opal to the world could be closed to 'protect Anangu of the APY Lands' from the perceived nefarious activities of a very small minority.

It did not seem at all rational nor reasonable that bone fide residents who had spent over half their lives establishing a home and livelihood for themselves in Mintabie were to be told to leave.

At that same meeting those in attendance were informed that the Govt. was to implement Recommendation Two of the 2017 Mintabie Review report regarding the MPSF.

It would be wrong for Recommendation Two of the 2017 Mintabie Review Report to be used to justify the current review into the MPSF given that within that Report it was stated that, '.... Issues related to the MPSF were not within the Terms of Reference of this review'.

At that same Mintabie meeting a notice (The Future of Opal Mining in Mintabie) was provided to residents which included sample questions to assist residents with making a submission.

All of those sample questions provided on that notice centred around the impacts should the MPSF be closed and/or if miners could mine in Mintabie but live in Marla.

No questions considered a scenario whereby the MPSF remained business as usual and new residential arrangements were negotiated between Mintabie miner and APY Board thereby allowing Mintabie miners to remain residing and working in Mintabie.

Such a scenario is very plausible given the APY Board was first to moot the idea which became Recommendation Four of the 2017 Mintabie Review Report.

In my opinion, the conversation and questions should be more centre around How can the Govt. assist the Mintabie miner to negotiate residential arrangements with the APY Board so as to be able to continue to live and mine for opal in Mintabie?

The Dept. of Energy and Mining can be of assistance in helping Mintabie miners formulate a proposal to present to the APY Board for approval. This proposal could revolve around a shared management of the Township.

It is yet to be seen how such arrangements may come about but people within Mintabie are well placed to assist the APY Board to share manage the Township and maintain the essential services of the town.

Those who may genuinely seek to remain living and working in Mintabie under an APY Permit or other approval should be allowed the opportunity to negotiate with the APY Board to that end.

That the Govt. has chosen to terminate its' contract with the APY Board and by default the residents of Mintabie, simply means, that the Govt.'s small role in administering Mintabie will be transitioned to the APY Board and where applicable to those Mintabie residents or organisations who gain APY Board approval to remain.

And I think that Mintabie residents should be allowed the opportunity to negotiate with the APY Board before any far reaching bureaucratic decisions are made regarding the future of the MPSF.

It is important that the process used is transparent and inclusive of all parties. If done this way the transition could be smooth.

The Govt. would do well to consult with the local Yankunyjatjara Traditional Owners. They are on record as saying they want Mintabie Township to stay and for the genuine opal miner to be allowed to continue to mine. They want to see the school and town infrastructure remain intact and they want somewhere to shop. Ask them.

Please find included my earlier communication to the Govt. (16-4-18) regarding my insights into the Future of the MPSF and the Opal Industry in general.

Note: That earlier communication was at a time when I thought there was still an opportunity for the Liason Committee to convene and try to resolve any problems. Something that I have asked the Govt, ad nauseum, to do.

Al Lad

Why would the SA Govt. want to close the third most productive Opal Field in Australia that provides a 'precious' commodity to the world market and which is unique to Australia?

There is absolutely no convincing argument to close the MPSF given its' highly respected and valued place in the Australian Opal Industry.

16th April 2018

The following are some of my insights into this issue and are for the benefit of the relevant Ministers and those on the committee of the current Mintabie Mining Review.

The Mintabie Precious Stones Field (MPSF) as with all other P.S. Fields is integral to keeping Australia's National Gemstone available for public consumption.

Economically opal draws international attention to Australia and this State.

To be the world's major supplier (95%) of a commodity described as one of the world's most sought after 'precious' gemstones cannot be taken for granted.

Opal in my opinion will be still most sought after long after, say shale oil.

An opal field allows the individual the right to get his /her Precious Stones Prospecting Permit (PSPP), the right to peg a claim, register it and begin their search for the elusive stone.

Thus, the humble opal miner carries on the traditions of the early gold diggers with a character unto themselves.

The miners from opal fields are so authentic that if given proper State support (ie international tourist advertising campaign) the 3 major opal fields in SA of CooberPedy, Mintabie, Andamooka could attract a strong international tourist contingent.

Opal is the unique gemstone that flashes a colour at you and a pattern as well. People see different things in the same stone and it is a wonderful feeling to find some.

That is a feeling you may want to continue to share with the world.

The MPSF has served the State well and can continue to do so.

The field is extremely viable for those with experience or luck to find colour.

Mintabie opal has a high international reputation because of its' quality, array of colours and its' stability and, as such, is in high demand.

Administration of the MPSF via your CooberPedy office has now been streamlined such that the cost of enforcing compliance has fallen sharply. Application forms can now be filled out at the Mintabie Post Office and faxed through to the CooberPedy office. This system is working better and costing less.

Mintabie has been a self-managed opal town since its' inception. The Mintabie Miners Progress Association (MMPA) is the representative body for the residents. During this time governance via committee has guided its' members.

And through it all a township was created based on the resilience of its' people and the community bonds that were forged with each other and with the aṅangu of the APY Lands.

Mintabie is in a good position for aṅangu in so much that it acts as a neutral meeting place for all the communities where they can noodle for opal to supplement their income and they can buy supplies on a Sunday. (APY stores historically stay closed on Sundays).

Closing the Mintabie township is not the answer nor is closing the MPSF.

Innocent people going about their daily business are being stressed at the thought of losing their livelihood and being manhandled from their homes. Some are old, they have done nothing wrong. They just want to see out their years in the opal country they have come to love (and that could quite possibly be by the end of the current lease in 2027).

It is a plausible and possible pathway for the current status quo to remain given that the MMPA is ready to more fully accept responsibility under the MTLA and promote shared management of the Township with the APY Board.

It is time a meeting of the parties to the MTLA including the MMPA takes place and try to mutually resolve this issue.

Al Lad

16th April 2018