

To: Department of Energy & Mining

South Australian Government

Re: Call for Submissions – “The Future of Opal Mining at Mintabie”

This Submission is made by:

Scott Bell & Anne Bell of [REDACTED].

We are members of the North Brisbane Lapidary Club and active fossickers who enjoy visiting the Precious Stone Fields and various fossicking areas throughout Australia. These areas are often in the more remote outback areas where we fossick, purchase opals and other semi-precious stones and enjoy our hobby of cutting & polishing. We are not miners and do not engage in any commercial activity such as selling. However, we have developed friendships within the mining communities in the areas we visit and contribute to & support the local communities & economy.

We consider we are Stakeholders to this review.

Impact of the closure of the MPSF:

1. “Opal” is Australia’s National Gem Stone and South Australia’s Gemstone Emblem. As such the South Australian Government as custodian of this rare resource has an obligation to ensure there is future public access to what is potentially the largest undeveloped opal field in Australia with an estimated resource value of \$3.6billion. (source – Mintabie Review, Dept of the Premier & Cabinet). This is resource value only and the multiplier effect on the contribution to the economy is many times greater.
2. Australia has been the World’s main source of high quality opal since it was discovered around the 1850’s. Unfortunately, we have recently witnessed the decline in production as fields in other States have diminished. The Lambina field in SA has closed and understand the Sturt Creek field maybe under review?
3. Opal mining has traditionally been undertaken by individuals or small enterprise and is labour intensive. The contribution to the local economy can be considerably greater than large scale mining of other minerals.
4. Tourism. Remote areas can benefit considerably from tourism which brings revenue to local businesses and creates employment opportunities for locals. Tourism contributed \$6.7billion to South Australia’s economy, employs 36,000 people and is growing 6% pa (Tourism SA) and is one of few economic and employment opportunities available in remote areas. While the dysfunctional issues within the APY Lands are well documented; within Government & Bureaucratic circles they can be seen as insurmountable problems leading to an attitude towards locking the area away or effectively fencing it off to the outside world. But in the long run this is unlikely to achieve any benefit or improvement to the APY people and their future generations. It would be better to open the region up, encourage tourism & job opportunities by embracing the potential of the Mintabie Opal Fields. If closed this potential benefit will be lost forever.
5. Fossicking. Is often overlooked by Governments and is a pastime activity for families and people of all ages. The Northern Territory Government has recognized its value particularly in remote areas and has been very proactive in preserving areas for fossicking. They have addressed the inevitable conflicts/concerns of land owners, pastoralist, traditionally owners, professional mining operators etc and currently have a number of trials in place aimed at improving safety and fostering stronger understanding between fossickers and pastoralists

and have developed codes of conduct. (<https://fossicking.nt.gov.au>) The South Australian Govt. could adopt some of these initiatives.

6. Closure of Mintabie Precious Stone Field. To lose for ever access to potentially the largest undiscovered opal resource in Australia would be a neglect of South Australian Government's responsibility & duty. The Closure of Mintabie is seen as the Government taking the easy way out in respect to problems existing in the APY Lands. The Government needs to build a "bridge" to link the APY community to the outside world rather than building a fence around the problem – this is surely a paternalistic approach.

7. Mintabie Township & MPSF. We were surprised to learn that the APY actually have "freehold title" to their land created by the 1981 APY Land Rights Act. They own 102,650 square kilometres of freehold land and have a population of 2,276 (2016 census). That makes them the largest owner of freehold land in Australia and possibly the world. An area half the size of Victoria or 44 times the area of the ACT. Each APY member effectively owns 45 square Kilometers of land.

If one of the large companies such as BHP Billiton or individuals such as Gina Reinhardt owned this much land pressure would be put on them to be a "good Corporate Citizen" and donate a tiny piece of land to the less fortunate citizens.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing for "reconciliation" for the APY who are so fortunate and land rich and to who Australian's have given so much to donate a "tiny, tiny" piece of their empire to their less fortunate Australian brothers??

As an existing, occupied township Mintabie should not have been included in the APY Land Rights Act 1981. The South Australian Government should learn from this past error and preserve the MPSF as an asset that belongs to all South Australians and the Nation.

Yours sincerely,

Scott & Anne Bell