

FLYING FOX NICKEL MINE AND PENNY WEST GOLD DEPOSIT

5611. Hon Giz Watson to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for the Environment

I refer to the Western Areas NL, Flying Fox Nickel Mine located south of Southern Cross, the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) Licence and Environmental Assessment Report dated 11 October 2007; a paper titled 'Penny West Gold Deposit, Youanmi, WA' produced by Nigel Radford and Tim Boddington concerning the Youanmi gold mine located approximately 115km south, south west of Sandstone, a media release from May 2005 by the Cooperative Research Centre for Landscape Environments and Mineral Exploration titled 'Gumtrees and Mulga: Signposts to Minerals'; a 2006 paper titled, 'Advances in Regolith research with respect to locating mineralisation' produced by R.R Anand from CSIRO Exploration and Mining, and I ask -

- (1) Will the Minister both table and quote the specific text of any reports which identify that tree roots for native vegetation in the area of the Flying Fox Nickel Mine only extend to 10 metres below ground level in order to justify this level being set as the trigger level to prevent hypersaline water impacts on tree roots for native vegetation in the area?
- (2) If no to (1), why not?
- (3) Can the Minister explain why do the report(s) referred to in (1), which may indicate tree roots for native vegetation only extending to 10 metres below the surface, take precedence under the precautionary principle of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* given there are many other technical reports and papers which clearly show that native vegetation has deep root systems which extend greater than 20 metres below ground level and up to 40 metres below the surface?
- (4) If no to (3), why not?
- (5) Can the Minister indicate the specific nature and how many breaches of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*, Environmental Field Notices, enforcement letters and written directions have been issued to the Flying Fox Nickel Mine in the last five years?
- (6) If no to (5), why not?
- (7) Will the Minister table copies of all the alleged breaches of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*, Environmental Field Notices, enforcement letters and written directions that have been issued to the Flying Fox Nickel Mine in the last five years?
- (8) If no to (7), why not?

Hon SALLY TALBOT replied:

- (1) Yes, 'Western Areas NL Final Report on Dewatering Operating Strategy Forrester Nickel Project (January 2007)'. [See paper 3598.]
Western Areas NL developed a dewatering operating strategy for their Forrester operations. Within this strategy is a range of measures to manage and mitigate the impacts of dewatering discharge back into the groundwater system. One of these strategies is to set water level triggers between 7m and 10m below ground level. The dewatering operating strategy outlines the basis for the setting of these triggers including, amongst other factors, surface drainage, root zone impacts, proximity of individual injection borefields to topographically low areas, existing groundwater levels and surface drainage features and the likely lead time required for groundwater level mounding to cease rising at the particular trigger location, after injection is ceased. A range of other measures is also included in the strategy including vegetation monitoring when water levels are less than 20m below ground level, water quality and water quantity measurements. DEC considered that the overall dewatering operating strategy included reasonable and practicable measures to manage the risk of environmental harm or pollution.
- (2) Not applicable.
- (3) A range of factors was considered in setting the trigger limits, including factors that were considered reasonable and practicable by the Department of Environment and Conservation. Caution must be applied to extrapolating data and reports from one area to another. The Youanmi mine is in the Murchison biogeographical region that is dominated by mulga communities with areas of relatively shallow potable groundwater utilised by trees and plant communities. The Flying Fox mine is in the Coolgardie biogeographical region (southwest interzone) that is dominated by Eucalypt woodland communities and heathland with saline or hypersaline groundwater not utilised by tree and plant communities.
- (4) Not applicable.

- (5) None.
(6)-(8) Not applicable.