

CORONAVIRUS — RESOURCES SECTOR

**279. MR S.J. PRICE to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:**

I refer to the importance of the state's resource sector in supporting the WA economy through COVID-19. Can the minister outline to the house what measures the McGowan government has taken to provide both relief and support to mining companies during this time?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:**

I thank the member for the question. I know that the member was a miner before he went into Parliament and he is certainly making a major contribution as the member for Forrestfield.

Several members interjected.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I am pleased to say that the government is very happily working very closely with the resource sector in this state and we are very pleased with the level of engagement we are having with representatives of the sector and the individual companies. As an example of the deep engagement we have with the sector, the Premier met with the iron ore sector only last week to make sure that it keeps carrying Australia's economy because without the Western Australian resource sector, Australia's economy would be in even more trouble than it already is.

I am pleased to say that in working with the industry, we have been able to take a number of actions to support it. The first thing we have done is announce the reduction in the mine safety levy, which will be reduced from 21¢ per billable hour to 17¢ per billable hour from 1 July 2020 to assist in reducing costs in the sector. As Warren Pearce, the chief executive officer of the Association of Mining Exploration Companies said, "This is welcome news for the mining and exploration industry." For the first time ever, we have also provided a guidance note to clarify the criteria for granting exemptions for exploration expenditure in Western Australia. The industry can apply for relief from the obligations on their exploration licences and get that approved by the delegates who operate in the department. For the first time ever, the minister—me—on behalf of the government, has provided a direction to the delegates to explain that those exploration companies that are seeking relief because of the COVID-19 situation are to be granted that relief rather than having to go through an individual discussion about whether the application is valid. Although the companies must make the claim and explain why they are making the claim, the fact that they do those two things through the online form 5 means they will get approval to have their obligations set aside for the current 12 months. Taking away those obligations will save the industry approximately \$190 million over the next 12 months, ending on 31 March 2021. In addition, the delegates in the department will also be able to provide an extension of time for payment of lease obligations, if a company seeks that. Again, the application can be made through the online form 5 process.

I must say that I urge local governments that also collect rates from exploration companies to look at what they are doing and understand that exploration companies need support at the moment. I urge local governments to ensure that exploration companies are assisted through this difficult time.

I would also like to let members know that we also had representations from the Chamber of Minerals and Energy regarding the requirements for so-called wet signatures on applications to the department; that is to say, a personal signature on a document. After that representation to me and my office, we discussed the matter with the department and we have again been able to provide very significant assistance to the industry by removing the requirement for personal signatures on a range of documents. That is something we will be able to continue into the future. We have also discussed with the Chamber of Minerals and Energy some suggestions it might make to the commonwealth government that would make it easier for corporations to fulfil online applications rather than requiring certification under the Corporations Act. We hope the commonwealth government will also be responsive. This, again, has been welcomed by the industry. Mr Paul Everingham, the chief executive officer of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, said —

"CME sought this practical approach from the Government not only for streamlining and efficiency purposes, but also to ensure that necessary industry engagement could continue during COVID-19,"

...

Now that DMIRS is moving to expand the use of electronic approaches, WA resources companies can now carry out their administrative business with the Department in a safer, more efficient manner, ...

We are very pleased to continue to work with the industry, dealing with fly in, fly out issues and movement between the regions of Western Australia and the occasional need for very peculiar, specialised skills from other states. We hope that we can continue to work with the industry to support Australia's economy, not just Western Australia's economy.