

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT — MINING PROJECTS

1843. Mr C.J. Tallentire to the Minister for Environment:

I refer to the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority (OEPA) and ask:

- (a) is there a defined system for assessing the appropriate level and type of offset for environmental approvals;
- (b) is the Minister aware of the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies (AMEC) submission to the OEPA on its Environmental Offsets Guidelines;
- (c) is the Minister aware that the mining industry is concerned at the manner in which environmental offsets have been applied to date in Western Australia;
- (d) is the Minister aware that other offset guidelines may be in development, and if so, what are they;
- (e) is the Minister aware of the examples highlighted by AMEC of a lack of consistency and transparency in the application of the Western Australian offsets policy;
- (f) is the Minister aware of the system of administration of cash payments as offsets and the lack of governance processes for managing the payments;
- (g) has the Government consulted industry about the cash offset framework;
- (h) is the Minister aware whether the offsets guidelines are applied consistently across all projects under environmental assessment by the regulator; and
- (i) is the Minister prepared to act on AMEC's request that to improve openness, transparency and accountability of the environmental offsets decision-making process a quantitative method that shows what offsets are accepted by the EPA should be developed?

**Mr A.P. Jacob replied:**

- (a) The Western Australian Environmental Offsets Policy defines the overarching principles for the application of offsets through environmental approval process in Western Australia. The Policy foreshadows the development of detailed guidelines to define the circumstance where offsets should apply and the type and quantum of those offsets.
- (b)–(c) Yes
- (d) Minister Marmion and I have jointly requested the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority to convene an Industry–Government Working Group to address the key issues raised in the position paper and incorporate these into an updated guideline. The Working Group is currently finalising a draft Western Australian Government Environmental Offsets Guidelines which will then be considered by Government.
- (e) Yes, these concerns are being addressed through the development of the draft Western Australian Environmental Offsets Guidelines.
- (f) Some conditions placed on mining and infrastructure proposals in the Pilbara through the environmental impact assessment process require a contribution of funds to a strategic conservation initiative. As yet, a strategic conservation fund has not been established and no funds have been provided by proponents pending further consideration by Government of the appropriateness of such a fund. If such a fund is established there will be a robust governance framework put in place that meets government expectations of accountability and transparency. Other proposals across Western Australia have, in the past, required the contribution of funding to a trust or third party to implement defined offsets. Where this has occurred, full governance arrangements have been in place.
- (g) Yes, consultation commenced in 2013, and further consultation will be undertaken this year.
- (h) See answer to (d).
- (i) The proposed Western Australian Environmental Offset Guidelines will achieve this outcome. I have also recently launched the Western Australian Environmental Offsets Register, which provides a public record of all offsets conditions, to provide further openness and transparency.