

MINING — LEASE APPROVALS

217. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:

I refer to reports that 500 mining leases are in the pipeline waiting for approval, with the average wait time being 313 days, which, in some cases, has blown out to 541 days. Given these shocking statistics, what is the minister doing to ensure that this logjam does not choke WA's pipeline of future investment in our very important mining industry?

Mr D.R. MICHAEL replied:

I thank the member for the question. Obviously, as all members know, the mining and resources sector is incredibly important to Western Australia's economy, wealth and prosperity as a state. The member for Central Wheatbelt would know that in December, the Premier announced approval reforms right across government within the Environmental Protection Authority, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and the mines department. A number of those reforms to streamline the mining approval process are progressing, including the delivery of eligible mining activity and mining development and closure proposal frameworks. There will be more to say about that in coming months. Both sets of reforms are on track to be delivered by the end of this year via the resources online portal, which is the department's digital transformation program.

The Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety reports that the average time for processing of mining lease applications has halved in the period from the last quarter of 2022 to the last quarter of 2023. It is not unusual for applications received to exceed applications finalised because it is not possible to complete the assessment of a mining lease within the quarter in which it is received. The assessment of mining leases also involves some factors that are beyond DEMIRS' control, including native title future act processes, referrals to other agencies and potential objections before the wardens. Further, some applications are withdrawn or dismissed, so not all applications result in a grant of title. The article states that mining proposal applications average 108 days, with only 43 per cent finalised in the department's 30-day target. As I said, as well as those factors beyond the department's control, other factors include the current tight labour market. DEMIRS is actively recruiting for those positions and has seconded senior officers to help with approvals. As I said, the Cook government is investing \$18 million to overhaul the environmental approval system, including legislative changes needed to slash green tape, reduce bottlenecks and provide additional resources for key approvals. They will be supported by the new coordinator-general team within the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation to facilitate approvals across government projects of state significance.

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The Premier, Deputy Premier, Minister for Environment and I drive the environment approvals reforms steering group, which looks at these issues on a regular basis with our public service to make sure we are making progress on the announcements we have made. I am aware, as I said, of that article but with our department, we are doing everything we can to clear those backlogs because we know that this is an important issue for the mining industry in Western Australia.