



Mining approvals still a mess: WA Auditor General

Kate Haycock
Tuesday, 7 October 2008

THE Auditor General of Western Australia says efforts to improve the approvals processes for resources projects have failed, leaving miners and explorers no better off than before the former government made a \$A37 million commitment to improving the process.

The Association of Mining and Exploration Companies has called the report a "damning indictment" of the processes faced by mining companies in getting projects up and running.



AMEC acting chief executive Sonia Webster said the group supported the plan of new Mines Minister Norman Moore to appoint a "lead agency", which would be the single point of contact for resource companies.

The group has called on the new Liberal government to address the issues contained in the Auditor General's report.

In the report – released today – the auditor said that despite the \$37.4 million allocated in 2004 by the state government, and initiatives put in place by government agencies to speed up approvals during that time, there have been no measurable improvements in the amount of time taken to process mining approvals.

The process remains lengthy and onerous, according to bodies such as AMEC.

As part of its report, the auditor reviewed the processes at the Department of Industry and Resources (DoIR), Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) and the Department for Planning and Infrastructure (DPI).

The auditor – responsible for monitoring public sector accountability and performance – said these agencies had worked on initiatives that included setting times for their processes and reporting on compliance to ease the strain on the system.

However, these improvements failed because projects could not be tracked across government, and agencies were not required to report on the time taken for the whole approvals process.

"Agencies do not routinely measure overall timelines and where delays may be occurring in other parts of the process," the auditor added.

Additionally, the auditor found the agencies had not changed their approval processes in response to the workload generated by the mining boom.

The watchdog also took issue with government agencies' lack of forward planning so the entire WA state was left without a clear strategy to help it deal with the resources demand.

Along with identifying the flaws in the current processing system, the Auditor General gave recommendations to make the process faster and less confusing.

These included a measure to identify proposals to allow tracking across agencies and the time taken for each part of the process, allowing the entire approvals process to be measured.

The auditor also said government agencies should analyse delays and identify potential improvements to processes.

DPC and DoIR should also develop and publish criteria for the assistance they provide proponents with in the approvals process, the auditor added.

In response to the auditor's findings, the four government agencies said they were committed to

improving processes but noted a lack of skilled staff to implement changes.

The full auditor's report can be viewed at
http://www.audit.wa.gov.au/reports/report2008_05.pdf