



'First Aboriginal-owned' iron ore mine in Pilbara gets environmental approval

By Gian De Poloni

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An iron ore mine believed to be Australia's first owned and operated by Aboriginal people is one step closer to becoming a reality after WA's environmental watchdog gave operators the green light.

Perth-based company Australian Aboriginal Mining Corporation Limited is hoping to develop its Extension project, a small open-cut mine about 70 kilometres north-west of Newman in the state's Pilbara region.

The company hopes it will one day be able to export two to four million tonnes of iron ore from the mine a year.

Extension is planned to be developed in close proximity to BHP Billiton's Yandi mine, Fortescue Metals Group's Cloudbreak operation and Rio Tinto's proposed Koodaideri project.

It is hoped one of those major miners will allow the company to haul ore to port on their private railway.

AAMC director Fergus Campbell declined to be interviewed but said production cannot commence until the company has secured access to third-party rail and port infrastructure or independently secured shipping capacity through Port Hedland.

AAMC describes itself as an Aboriginal owned, operated and managed company. It is part-owned by Indigenous contractor Carey Mining.

EPA chairman Doctor Paul Vogel said there were minimal environmental concerns with AAMC's proposal.

"There are a small number of factors that can be readily managed," he said.

"The only two factors that we considered were flora and vegetation, and the issue of offsets because the area it's in is subject to increasing development pressure."

He said the company would be required to enforce a flora and vegetation management plan.

"Minimising disturbance by backfilling and having buffers around important plant communities are all measures the company will implement to avoid and minimise their environmental impacts on the area," he said.

About 530 hectares of native vegetation will need to be cleared for the mine, which will also include access roads, an accommodation camp, an ore crushing and processing plant and a water supply system.

Dr Vogel said the area was already largely consumed by mining activity.

"We've got vegetation which is continuing to be cleared as the result of mining, particularly in the Fortescue Marsh catchment, where we only have about half a percent of some of that very good vegetation in the conservation estate," he said.

"So that's why this proposal has attracted a level of offsets, which we've recommended go into a government-approved conservation fund for the Pilbara."

Environment Minister Albert Jacobs is expected to decide in the coming weeks if the project should receive state environmental approval.

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