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Government of
South Australia

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New access regime to unlock up to \$35 billion of mineral resources in WPA

Mineral Resources and Energy Minister Tom Koutsantonis has welcomed the passing of legislation that will unlock potential mineral resource discoveries and developments in the region of the Woomera Prohibited Area (WPA), estimated to be worth up to \$35 billion.

The *Defence Legislation Amendment (Woomera Prohibited Area) Bill 2014*, which passed Federal Parliament yesterday, creates a regulatory framework for access to the WPA, including rules for explorers wanting to develop the significant mineral resources in the area.

“These new rules will free up access to an estimated \$35 billion worth of gold, uranium, copper and iron ore that lie beneath the surface of the WPA,” Mr Koutsantonis said.

“The region already hosts the Challenger gold mine, Prominent Hill copper gold mine and Peculiar Knob, high-grade iron ore mine.

“A new access regime will allow the development of multiple mineral deposits across the breadth of the WPA, potentially transforming it into one of the country’s most significant resources provinces.

“That means million of dollars in further investment and hundreds of jobs for South Australians.”

Stretching over 127,000 square kilometres - roughly equivalent to the area of England - the WPA potentially contains some of the richest mineral and petroleum resources in the world.

According to Geoscience Australia, 62 per cent of Australia’s known copper resources are believed to be located in the area, as well as 78 per cent of the nation’s known uranium resources.

While defence would remain the primary user of the area for testing and evaluation, the legislation sets out user access rights, an access permit scheme, compensation and cost recovery arrangements, enforcement provisions and an appeals process.

Former Senator for South Australia Don Farrell had been instrumental in pushing for the development of an appropriate access regime to the WPA.

The drafting of the legislation followed consultation with industry stakeholders including resource companies, pastoralists and other parties seeking to access the area.

Mr Koutsantonis said the State Government has taken significant steps to unlock the potential of the region.

“Earlier this year, we released a major package of geoscientific data for the highly prospective Gawler Craton to assist explorers wishing to assess the potential of the WPA,” he said.

“In the 2014-15 State Budget we also committed to a \$44 million suite of initiatives for the resources sector.

“This included the development of a world-class resources precinct at Tonsley with a new State Drill Core Reference Library at its heart, as well as the expansion our PACE (Plan for Accelerated Exploration) scheme.

“We recognise that every new hole drilled brings us closer to our next major discovery, which is why these initiatives will assist in maximising the potential of the WPA.

“This is a win-win for the important principles of Multiple Land Use and co-existence between the vital industry sectors of resources and defence, which will drive economic growth and prosperity in the next decades.”