



Fwd: hope downs /weeli wolli for web....

From: Slim Parker (slim.parker@internode.on.net)
 Sent: Thursday, 17 April 2008 3:48:47 AM
 To: William Day (bartlettday@hotmail.com); Andrei Koeppen (ceo@marndamia.com.au); Barry Taylor (Barry.Taylor@ngarda.com.au); Guy Parker (guy.parker@internode.on.net); maitlandparker@bigpond.com.au; jundaru@westnet.com.au

FYI comments and views happily received.

Thanks

Slim

Begin forwarded message:

From: Techa Beaumont <advocacy@mpi.org.au>
 Date: 16 April 2008 6:33:08 PM
 Cc: Paul Sheiner <psheiner@civilawyers.com.au>, Slim Parker <slim.parker@internode.on.net>
 Subject: Re: hope downs /weeli wolli for web....

Can I put Slim's contact as available for media comment on the media release (finalised integrating your comments) below or would you prefer not?
MPI's preferred approach is to make sure that the perspectives of those most directly concerned about these issues are accessible - rather than our interpretation of these views, however whatever suits you best is fine with us

My understanding is that the groups in the UK will read out the comment you made in the first paragraph below and then get a response from the company to this at the AGM in London on Thursday.

I should have a report back from those in attendance as to the company's response and will make sure you get whatever information I receive

regards
 Techa

MEDIA RELEASE:

Calls for preservation of country and a halt to Rio Tinto's proposed Hope Downs Iron Ore mine

A day before their London based Annual General Meeting, Senior Elder of the traditional owners of the country impacted by the Hope Downs minesite has requested Rio Tinto to halt operations and reconsider its proposed mining activities on site. Slim Parker urged the company: "In light of what they have done in the past destroying important sites in the area, they have the opportunity to make amends - they have the capacity today to make the decision not to mine this area at all. Our wish is to protect the scientific, historical cultural and spiritual heritage values of the area, and that they be preserved so everyone can share the significance. I have always maintained that this area should not be mined at all, that it should be preserved. Rio Tinto should halt their operations. The traditional owners, the Fortescue Martidja Banyjima people and the Nirayapila people are united in our desire to preserve this area."

Results of testing of some of the sensitive sites for which protection is sought has had archeologists identifying the site as one of the most significant archeological finds in Australia, with initial discovery of artefacts dating back at least 35,000 and further investigations scheduled.

This is a litmus test for the value of Rio Tinto's commitments to the environment and to indigenous people. Their own policies require them to respect the wishes of the traditional owners of the area and minimise their impact on the environment. If they won't meet their own standards here in Australia where they are subject to scrutiny, then we have a dismal indication of what they are doing everywhere else in the world" stated Techa Beaumont, Executive Director of the Mineral Policy Institute

The Mineral Policy Institute is supporting the efforts to protect the area and calling on Rio Tinto to :

-immediate and ongoing halting of any ground work on site to ensure the stringent protection of all potential sites of significance in the area. This including a guarantee to the senior custodians and other Aboriginal traditional owners that their express wishes that certain sites -including some of the most significant archeological discoveries ever found in Australia and areas of cultural importance and that mining does not take place on any sites without free and prior

- informed consent of traditional owners responsible for the country
- commission and make public an independent study on the options for reinjection of freshwater into the aquifers in the region from mine dewatering that will avoid freshwater depletion, ecosystem and cultural heritage destruction and address the serious cumulative impacts of waste water from mining in the region

"The government of Western Australia has failed to take measures to adequately protect these important cultural sites and natural values. The government should be undertaking strategic regional reviews of cumulative impacts of mining in regions such as the Pilbara. Numerous significant mines in this area are all in the perched aquifer system posing huge cumulative threats to the Fortescue system (change from event focussed to perennial river system) and huge expansions to the current activities are on the cards." stated Ms Beaumont

FURTHER DETAILS:

UTUBE STORIES:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPBhVTDs2X8&NR=1>

niyayaparli people's story:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTaJpUAQ0dU&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNajf1aREJg&feature=related>

Traditional owners, environmental and heritage experts have a number of concerns over the proposed operation:

CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Senior Elder Slim Parker reiterated the spiritual significance of the area for his people: "The archaeological finds are in accordance with the dreamtime stories and songs and customs and beliefs that we have and what we practice today. It is what we talk about in terms of spiritual beliefs of mother earth as our provider, as our mother it provides for us, and in accordance with our customs and beliefs this area is of real cultural significance. It is what we call in our law, Jibalba. It is a ritual place where ceremonies are performed to allow the totem there to provide the honey for us, that whole area is significant, not just the finds - the whole valley is important to us."

In other operations in particular the Rio Tinto owned Marandoo project, which was gazetted out of national park to pave the way for mining, the company drilled through and destroyed other rock shelters before there could be proper investigations, disturbing the site and making it unsafe for the archaeologists to work there. The true significance of what is destroyed in these other areas will now never be known.

Rio Tinto's policies state that it "recognises and respects the significance of the cultural heritage of Indigenous people who have traditional ownership of, or historical connections to, the land on which Rio Tinto businesses operate" (<http://www.aboriginalfund.riotinto.com/common/pdf/Aboriginal%20Policy%20and%20Programs%20-%20June%202007.pdf>.) and that the company will "strive to achieve free and prior informed consent of indigenous people to proceed with development" (www.riotinto.com/documents/ReportsPublications/corpPub_HumanRights.pdf.)

IMPACTS ON WEELI WOLLI CREEK

Rio Tinto's Iron Ore (RTIO) operations at Hope Downs are proposing to discharge 110ML PER DAY (40.15 GL a year) of potable water from its mine dewatering processes into the Weeli Wolli Creek in the Pilbara for the life of mine of 15-20 years. (Rio Tinto is presently discharging approximately 70ML per day and wants to increase the amount). It will further impact cultural heritage sites and natural vegetation, and is depleting groundwater which are likely to take at least 20 years to replenish. Much of this water will be lost through evaporation.

RTIO has promised government that it will recharge the aquifer post mining by sourcing 25ML of water a day from outside the catchment area and pumping it back into the spring for 25 years post mining but has never said how it will do it or find the water, with traditional owners of the country and environmentalists both assessing such a proposal as impossible.

Rio Tinto's David Richards has publically stated "New mining projects, particularly those in areas already suffering water stress, should be designed to be at worst, neutral in their effect on water resources." (per David Richard, Rio Tinto p6, Business Perspectives on the Findings of the MA (2006))

Rio Tinto has failed to adequately investigate or develop techniques to implement the best available technology at Weeli Wolli that would have progressively recharged the watertable rather than depleting it are impacting an already stressed water system and a broader bioregion. Their approach has caused distress to the traditional owners of the region, where a number of cultural heritage sites are located in and along the river are impacted by existing dewatering and further threatened by the Hope Downs proposal.

The potable water that is proposed to be dumped down the creek is an important resource available for future use that will, according to current understandings may take thousands

of years to recharge.

The cumulative impact of dewatering by iron ore projects in the region is likely to have massive regional impacts that extend to downstream environments and long term impacts on the whole Fortescue catchment. According to MPIs Robin Chapple who has monitored the developments in the region for decades, arrangements to recharge the aquifer rather than discharge the water in a delicate creek system were outlined by the corporation as the approach that would be taken by previous operators of the the Hope Downs iron ore project to the government for the mine's development. The company can minimise its impact both its short and long term impacts on water resource and associated ecosystems as well as avoid impacts on important cultural heritage sites of concern to the areas traditional owners if it implements the proposal of the originanl owners.

ARCHEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL SITES

Ancient tools found in a prehistoric dwelling place on the Hope Downs site have been confirmed as one of the most significant archeological finds in Australia. The find in archeological terms is globally significant, with the tools dated as 35,000 years old being compared by scientists to the finds in Lake Mungo in NSW which warranted the inclusion of the cultural values of the area in a World Heritage nomination. Dr Draper, who has been invovled in recent investigations of the sites explained to the Western Australian newspaper: "The cave is a rock shelter measuring 10 by eight metres, with a roof 1.5 metres high. The 1.5-metre excavation pit goes down 2.2 metres to the bedrock below, and there is evidence of Aboriginal occupation down to two metres deep, he said. The tools, along with seeds, bark and other plant material, were found nearly 6 1/2 feet beneath the floor of the shelter _ a slight crevice in the hillside protected by an overhang of rock _ on the edges of an iron ore mine site about 590 miles northeast of Perth, the capital of Western Australia. Twelve other sites in the area have also yielded archaeological evidence such as stone tools, fireplaces and dateable charcoal as well as plant remains such as seeds and bark. Another 20 have still to be excavated. Further sealed off caves are thought to be ancient burial tombs and are yet to be investigated." There is the possibility that once excavation work is carried out that materials could be even older and that sites not yet investigated could hold even more significant finds.

Quoted in the Age newspaper Slim Parker, a senior elder of the Fortescue Martidja Banyjima people said "We have always known this is an important part of our history, that our ancestors live here. Our stories and songs tells us this. It is a good feeling to know archaeologists have proved what we say is true. It makes us feel strong. Now we want this place preserved. It is part of our heritage and our culture. This area of land, in regard to our culture and customs and beliefs, is of great significance to us," Parker said. "We have songs and stories relating to that area as a sustaining resource that has provided for and cared for our people for thousands of years." An archeological study shows Mr Parker's ancestors lived in the area for more than 1000 generations.

Melbourne University's Professor Jim Bowler, who discovered bones on the shores of Lake Mungo in the late 1960s — later estimated to be 40,000 years old, making them the oldest human remains found in Australia — said: "This appears to be a very, very important find. It seems likely to write a new chapter in the history of Aboriginal Australia."

Since these artefacts refitted together, it showed that the site had not been previously disturbed. "We now hope Rio will redesign the mine to protect this site, so that we can begin a major salvage operation," said Dr Draper, the consultant who headed the team investigating the sites. It is reported that discussions are now under way between the company and the traditional owners, who want the sensitive areas protected from mining.

Rio Tinto, which had been expanding its Hope Downs mine, halted all work when the rock shelter was discovered and will amend its expansion plans to preserve the sheltercompany spokesman Gervase Greene was reported as saying
(http://www.townhall.com/news/world/2008/04/07/ancient_tools_unearthed_in_australia?page=1)

information based on reports by Jan Maymen in the Western Australian, April 7 2008, interviews with Slim Parket, and online news sources referenced in text

Rinehart refuses to guarantee protection of prehistoric site

KIM MACDONALD

10/04/08

The mining company owned by Australia's richest woman, Gina Rinehart, has fuelled concerns about whether it will protect a prehistoric Aboriginal dwelling found on one of its Pilbara iron ore projects, refusing yesterday to guarantee that it would permanently quarantine the area from mining.

A statement released by her company Hancock Prospecting said Mrs Rinehart would offer a further section of her family's station, Mulga Downs, to house some of the 35,000-year-old indigenous tools discovered recently. But director Tad Watroba did not

respond to questions from *The West Australian* over whether the company would permanently quarantine the rock overhang and surrounding areas on the Hope Downs South mine where the discovery was made.

Joint owner Rio Tinto has already revealed that it would ensure the temporary protection of the area by changing the construction of the mine site, but it refused to guarantee the area would be protected permanently from mining.

Mr Watroba said Mrs Rinehart had already given some of Mulga Downs to the family of Slim Parker, an elder with the local Martidja Banyjima peo-

ple, which the family had called Youngaleena. "Slim Parker, his family and the Martidja Banyjima people may wish to consider these artefacts being moved to Youngaleena for instance, or somewhere else in the traditional areas," he said.

"Mrs Rinehart would be delighted to offer a further part of Mulga Downs station for the traditional owners to store these historical artefacts adjacent to Youngaleena should this be an alternative solution that would suit the interests of all parties."

Mr Parker said he would consider the offer but would prefer a cultural centre be set up in the Karijini National Park to store a range of

Aboriginal artefacts. The company's failure to offer a guarantee prompted calls for the State Government to investigate how it could ensure the permanent protection of the rock overhang and surrounding areas.

"We call on the people of WA and Australia to say enough is enough . . . We should all call on the WA Government to do something about this," Mr Parker said.

Indigenous Affairs Minister Michelle Roberts has been unavailable for comment.

A spokesman for Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett suggested the State had the power to intervene.



Gina Rinehart.

News

3

Radiocarbon tests date tools from north-west WA as among oldest in Australia, confirming locals' songs and stories

**JAN MAYMAN
EXCLUSIVE**

Ancient Aboriginal tools found on a Pilbara minesite have been dated at 35,000 years old — among the oldest so far discovered in Australia.

Archaeologists believe the dig could yield material up to 40,000 years old, comparable with the internationally famous Lake Mungo discovery in NSW.

The tools were found in a prehistoric dwelling place that is now part of the multi-billion-dollar Hope Downs iron ore mine, about 50km from Newman. It is jointly owned by the international mining giant Rio Tinto and Gina Rinehart's Hancock Prospecting.

Archaeologists hired by the Aboriginal Traditional Owners, have just released the results of radiocarbon tests indicating that it is one of the oldest dated sites in Australia, internationally significant as a prehistoric record of humanity.

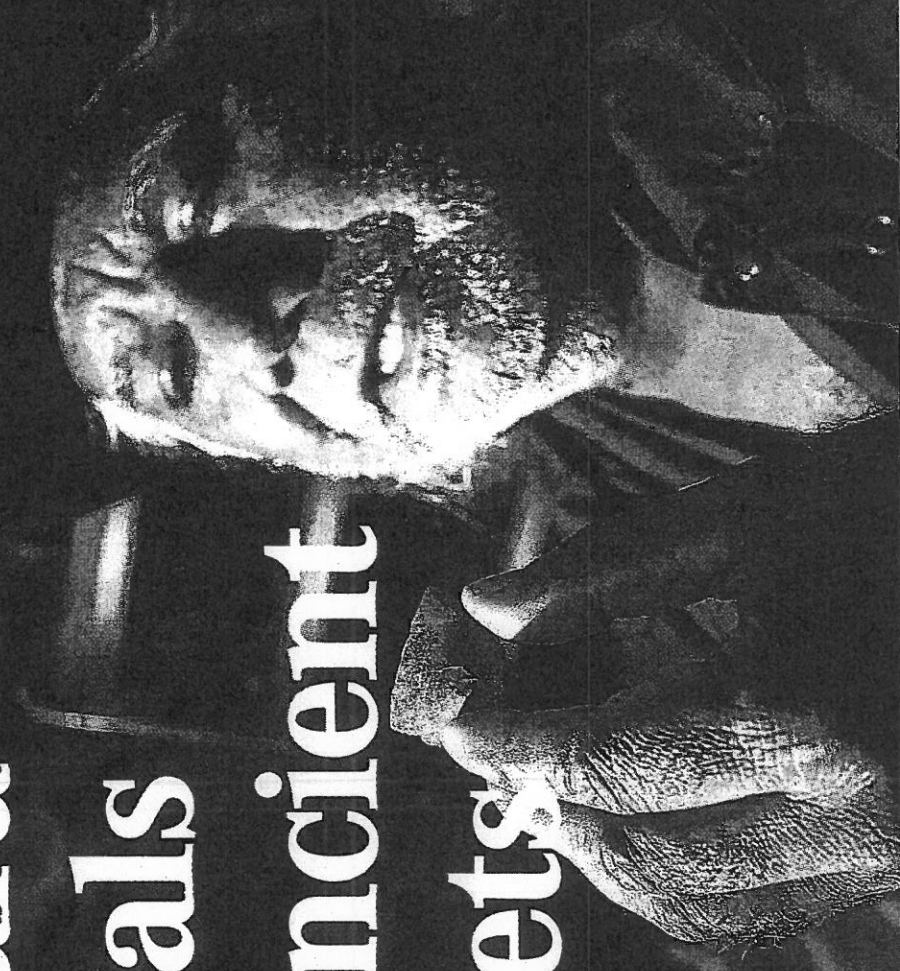
"We have always known this is an important part of our history, that our ancestors lived here," said senior elder Slim Parker, a leader of the Aboriginal Martidja Banyjima people. "Our stories and songs tell us this."

"It is a good feeling to know archaeologists have proved what we say is true. It makes us feel strong. Now we want this place preserved. It is part of our heritage and our culture."

The tests show Aboriginal people lived in the area for a thousand generations.

The archaeological dig site is a 35,000-year record of history that is

Pilbara reveals its ancient secrets



Historic find: Maitland Parker holds a chert — dated at 35,000 years old and used for cutting — found at Hope Downs mine near Newman. Pictures: Tony McDonough

tools. Study of the dated sediments would tell scientists much about climate change as they studied variations in the colour, grain size

Most of the stone tools are small cutting implements. Some were found beside a fireplace containing charcoal dated

as well as the way Australia's first people adapted to their environment and developed tool technology to hunt and collect their food supplies. They had a richly varied diet and cooked some of their food: traces of ancient campfires were found near the cave.

Archaeologists say they probably ate hundreds of different animal and plant foods according to season and availability, like the Aboriginal people encountered by the first

weathering and erosion.

"This appears to be a very, very important find," said Professor Jim Bowler, of Melbourne University, the geologist who discovered and researched the celebrated Mungo site in 1968.

"It seems likely to write a new chapter in the history of Aboriginal Australia."

Another eminent scholar, Dr Ian Crawford, former curator of archaeology and anthropology at the WA Museum, said further work on

It is a good feeling to know archaeologists have proved what we say is true. It makes us feel strong. Now we want this place preserved. It is part of our heritage and our culture.

MARTIDJIA BANYJIMA LEADER SLIM PARKER

European colonists. Most of the stone tools discovered are sharp-edged, clearly designed to cut meat and plant materials for food, and also for wood-working — planning, boring, chiselling and cutting to make other tools and weapons.

Patterns of usage wear on tool edges will tell how the Pilbara Aboriginal people developed technology to survive their harsh environment. The type of stone material used will tell a story about their makers' mobility and travel.

No stone weapons or spearheads were found: these are not common in Aboriginal Australia, except for some areas of the tropical north.

"We are thrilled at the test results," said the Banyjimas' consultant archaeologist Dr Neale Draper. "This is a major scientific discovery. It contains a large number of stone tools and it is one of the most data-rich ancient sites in Australia, with an exceptional amount of information about climate change through the last Ice Age, the earliest occupation of the Pilbara and north-west Australia."

The site was specially important because it contains such an ancient layer of environmental data as well as

this site was most important.

The discovery of ancient tools was especially significant, he said. So far, no human remains have been found near the dig site, but the archaeologists and Aboriginal elders have found other caves in the area that appear to have been deliberately walled in, and could be tomb burial places like some found in the Northern Territory.

"Some of these niches are empty. They are being investigated with great care and respect," Dr Draper said.

The sheer antiquity and quality of the material was amazing, he said. "This is a forensic record of the history of indigenous Australia, especially in the Pilbara."

"The cave is a rock shelter measuring 10m by 8m, with a roof 1.5m high.

"The 1.5m excavation pit goes down 2.2m to the bedrock below, and there is evidence of Aboriginal occupation down to 2m deep."

Twelve other sites in the area had also yielded archaeological evidence, like stone tools, fireplaces, dateable charcoal as well as plant remains like seeds and bark.

Another 20 had yet to be excavated.

traces of organic material on the tools could provide evidence of prehistoric food supplies and climate change when further testing is complete.

"The most significant artefacts we found are a core and two flakes at the site layer dated to 35,000 years ago,"

Dr Draper said.

"The reason these are significant is because the flakes refit on to the core rock."

"This demonstrates the way early Aboriginal peoples manufactured stone artefacts."

Because these artefacts refitted together, it showed that the site had not been previously disturbed. "We now hope Rio will redesign the mine to protect this site, so that we can begin a major salvage operation."

He said discussions were under way between the company, the Aboriginal Traditional Owners and their archaeologists, in an effort to preserve the site.

Dr Draper, managing director of Australian Cultural Heritage Management Ltd, a national consultancy, said the carbon dating was done at the University of Waitako in New Zealand, which had state-of-the-art equipment.

The dig was supervised by leading US archaeologist W. Boone Law, who said it was the most significant project that he had ever worked on.

"There are at least 12 stone artefacts buried up to 10cm below the 35,000 year date, inferring the site is much older. We do not know the age of the earliest artefacts, but based on the rock shelter stratigraphy, it is likely around 40,000 years," he said.

"We recovered most of the artefacts below the charcoal we found and dated to 25,000 years BP, before present."

The site was of great international importance.

"I know that the scientific value of this rock shelter will be emphasised across the wider academic community, but for me personally, my memories of excavating this site will always be tied to working with the Banyjima people," Mr Boone Law said.



A thousand generations: Trevor Parker and Brian Tucker in a cave at the site that archaeologists have deemed 'data rich'.

The Canberra Times

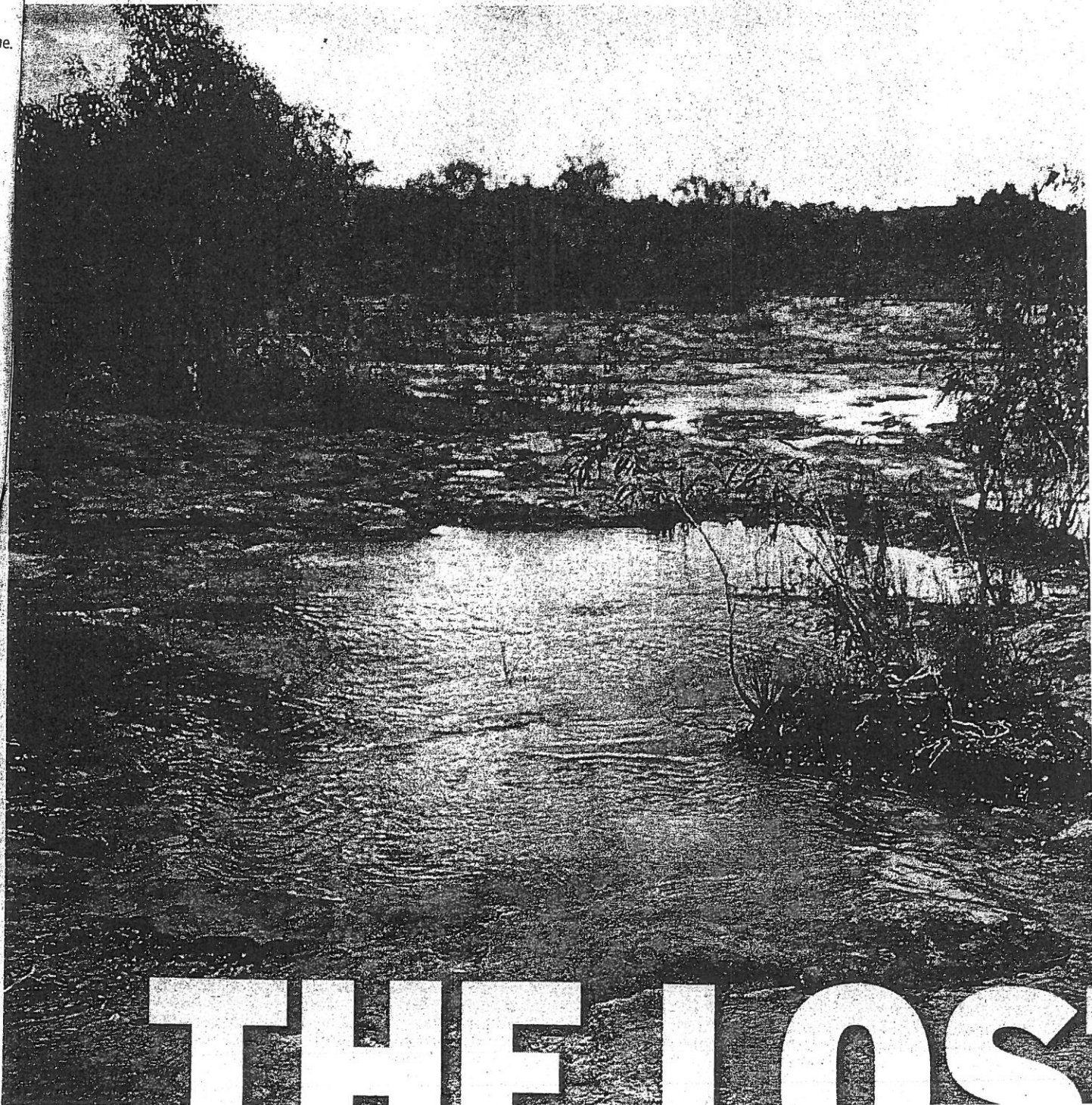
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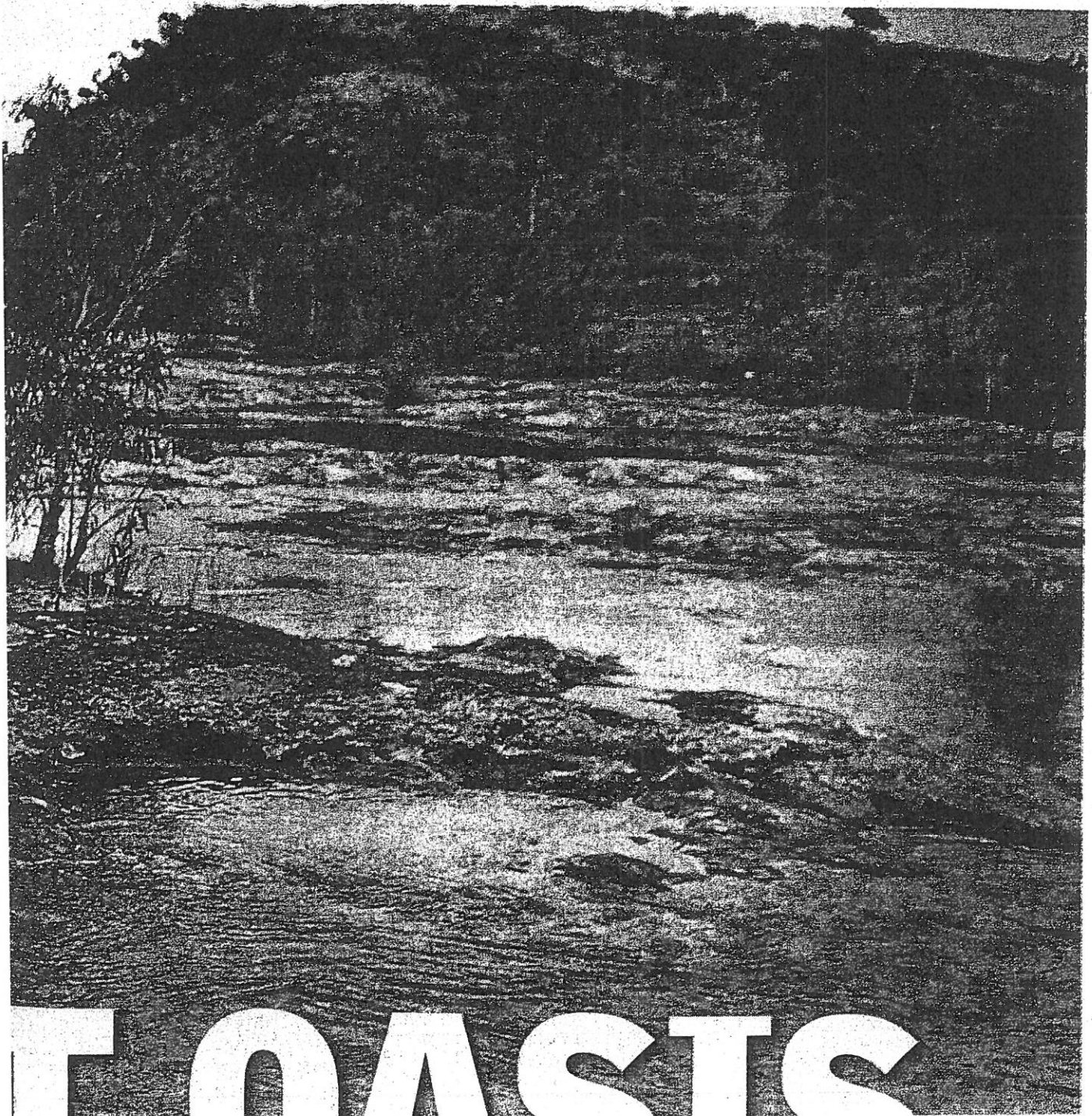
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The long road to reconciliation

PAGE B5



Saturday, May 19, 2007



TOASTS

FILE

REVERED: Weeli Wolli, a hauntingly beautiful spring in the Pilbara, is regarded by traditional Aboriginal groups as the home of the Rainbow Serpent deity, the

A spring in the Pilbara has been central to the Martu Idja Banyjima people's world for

THE cave sheltered the first Australians for 18,000 years in some of the oldest rocks on Earth, in Western Australia's Pilbara.

There people lived and loved and raised their children, celebrating their culture with song and ceremony. They worshipped their gods for aeons as civilisations rose and fell in faraway lands: before Stonehenge, the Pyramids and the Great Wall of China.

Only Aboriginal people mourned when the cave was blasted away by mining, like so many other special places in the Pilbara in the past 40 years.

Not far from the cave site, 75km north-west of Newman, Aboriginal elder Slim Parker is close to tears as he contemplates the impact of mining on a small creek that was the centre of his ancestral world. It is his own heartland too, a place called Weeli Wolli, revered by traditional Aboriginal groups all over the Pilbara as the home of the Rainbow Serpent deity, their great creator.

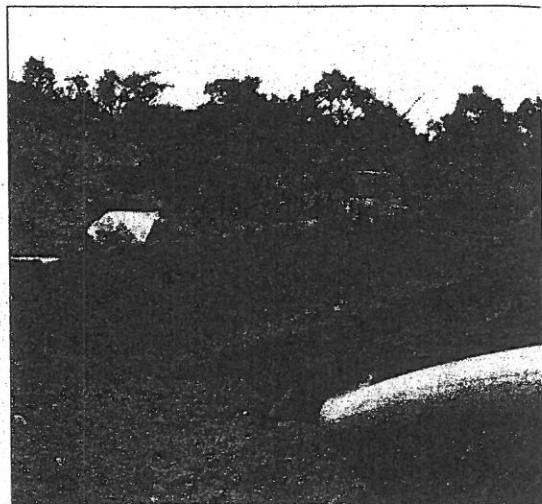
The creek flows through a hauntingly beautiful landscape: verdant sub-tropical vegetation rich in birds and animals, many protected species like the Peregrine falcon and the Pebble Mound mice, which build nests of small stones. Shady pools ripple and gleam with fish and other water creatures, like the critically endangered Olive Python, an awe-inspiring amphibian that grows to 3m and lives 30 years, or more.

Walls of red-banded jasper, ironstone and blue-grey marble line spectacular, eerie gorges. Rock carvings in caves illustrate ancient beliefs and ritual dances; archaeologists have dated some at 20,000 years or more. A rare oasis in a harsh, dry region, Weeli Wolli is a place of intense spiritual significance to Parker and his clan of 200 women, men and children.

The miners are pumping water down the creek to get at the rich iron ore, most of it below the present water table in an underground aquifer. Drowning is already destroying Weeli Wolli's fragile ecology.

"We are not opposed to mining, we know we can't stop it, but we want the creek protected," Parker says. He is an angry and determined man.

Some indigenous groups have negotiated lucrative compensation deals with the big miners; others, without native title claims, still live in poverty, lacking education and even



OUTSPOKEN: Aboriginal elder Slim Parker, a charismatic leader, and centre, a pipeline near the Weeli Wolli spring

basic health. Only a lucky few are employed on the big mines. The mass destruction of iconic sites has undermined the foundations of the Aboriginal world, its communities fragmenting into despair and self-destruction. Only the strongest survive.

Parker and his Martu Idja Banyjima group are very strong. At 50, Parker is a legend in the Pilbara, a charismatic and outspoken Aboriginal leader who emerged in the bitter dispute, which blocked one mine project for two years – Marandoo, owned by Rio Tinto subsidiary Hamersley Iron.

This was after a West Australian Labor government tried to neatly erase the company's indigenous problems in the early '90s, with legislation exempting that mine from the Aboriginal Heritage Act. The long delay was hugely costly for the company in money and reputation: since then, it has worked hard to improve its image and its relations with the indigenous community.

Parker was devastated when he saw the impact of mine drainage on the Weeli Wolli creek during a recent visit with his people. Because it is now officially a mine site, Hope Downs, they needed company permission to enter their tribal land. They found the once-pristine stream infested with algae, tall weeds blocking timeworn access tracks after just three months of mine drainage. Part of the watercourse is now closed with a heavy-duty wire grid.

The mine joint venturer partners, Rio Tinto Iron Ore and Hancock Prospecting, maintain that their minesite will be rehabilitated when

mining ends, in about 20 years time. But Parker and his people believe this is impossible, since the creek's source is a spring fed from the same aquifer now being drained. They fear it will eventually dry up and vanish.

According to Rio Tinto, mining will discharge up to 110,000KL a day into Weeli Wolli for six years at peak flow, a torrent that could double during Wet season downpours. Eight bores are now pumping out between 45,000 and 50,000KL per day. The company says it is still exploring a range of possibilities for finally recharging the spring.

"How can it ever be the same?" Parker asks heavily. "That is good drinking water they are wasting too. Where will the new water come from? The company can't tell us. Water tables are falling all over the Pilbara because of mining. We never realised how much water they would pump into the creek, what it would do to Weeli Wolli. I will have to live with this for the rest of my life."

As a leading elder, Parker has guided his group in complex negotiations with the Hope Downs Joint Venture partners over a multimillion-dollar agreement to pay them royalties when mining begins. Details are commercially confidential.

"It is not much money really, considering what they make from our country and we don't get it all at once, they pay us in dribs and drabs. They earn a lot more money than we do," he says, pointing to Rio Tinto's 2006 profit of almost \$8 billion.

A former stockman who left school at 15, Parker is sharply intelligent and articulate, with a keen grasp of

political realities. He has a powerful air of authority, a deep, precise voice. One of his many languages, more than 30 in the Pilbara, he says, understands them. "But I can only speak four really well," he says.

Though his manner is courteous, he is not a diplomat by all accounts. He has brothers and two sisters, determined as he is to live for their people. "Each other if any of us die," he says.

As future projects of indigenous Karijini Limited company, he has a great diplomatic role in his preparing for endless miners, communicating and mobile phone, in the Pilbara and flying to meet lawyers, mining government officials. compensation agreements over another Pilbara measure of prosperity, the first since colonisation.

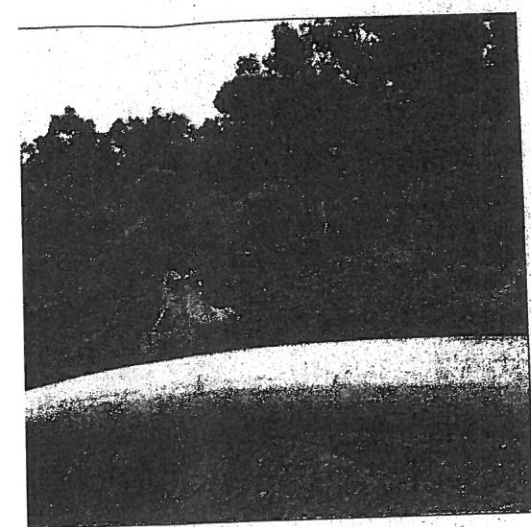
After years of meetings, Downs, and an initial agreement, relations between the group and Rio Tinto company, when the company building a big water pipeline minesite before the Western government's Aboriginal Materials Committee objections from the tribal owners.

By law, the state's Indigenous Affairs Minister takes this committee before permission for any pa

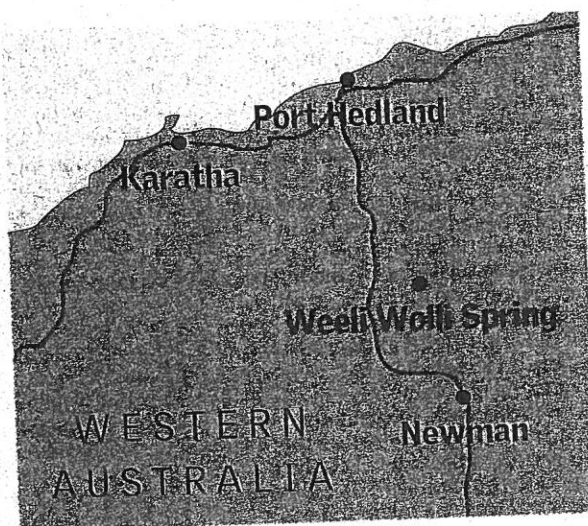
PILOASIS

nt deity, their great creator. Picture: Tony McDonough

world for millennia. Now mining threatens it – and their – future, **JAN MAYMAN** reports.



eli Wolli spring.



realities. He radiates a clear air of authority, speaking in a precise voice. English is only one of many languages: there are about 30 in the Pilbara, and he speaks, understands most of them. But I can only speak about a little well," he explains. Though his manner is gentle and calm, he is not a man to cross, he counts. He has three sons and two sisters, all as proud as he is to make a better life for his people. "We support each other if any of us ever feel lost,"

ture projects officer of the Pilbara Karijini Development Authority, he has a gruelling, active role in his community, organising for endless meetings with local people, communicating by email, mobile phone, driving all over the Pilbara and flying often to Perth to meet lawyers, miners and government officials. A partnership agreement with BHP for the other Pilbara mine brought a sense of prosperity to his group, but not since colonisation. Years of meetings over Hope Downs, and an initial financial agreement, relations between his group and Rio Tinto deteriorated last year when the company began laying a big water pipe from the Hope Downs mine to the Weeli Wolli spring before the WA Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee had considered objections from the traditional owners. Now, the state's Indigenous Minister takes advice from the committee before granting permission for any party to damage

or disturb significant archaeological sites: but its decisions can be overruled.

On behalf of the Martu Idja Banyjimas, Parker presented detailed evidence to the committee to explain why the creek and its surrounding environment were so deeply important to them, even quoting reports by the company's own professional anthropologists and archaeological consultants.

Committee members were handed two documents illustrated with big, colored images of the new pipe and told how flooding the Weeli Wolli Creek would damage existing vegetation and especially culturally significant trees, by creating a new, artificial ecosystem.

The Martu Idja Banyjima people had not been consulted properly about the pipeline and mine dewatering, they maintained. Instead, they had been given presentations telling them what would happen: a claim strongly rejected by Rio Tinto.

Above all, they asked where the mining company would find water to recharge the aquifer and the spring when all the iron ore was extracted.

A West Australian Environmental Protection Authority report on the Hope Downs project was also quoted in their submission to the committee, confirming the cultural value of the area: it said ethnographic research revealed that Weeli Wolli spring and its surrounds were of major mythological and ceremonial significance, as well as high environmental importance, due to biological and conservation values. It said any detrimental impact of the

proposal on Weeli Wolli spring should be accepted as a "fatal flaw" in the proposal.

The report notes that mining ore below the water table would require a large dewatering operation over the life of the mine that would lower groundwater levels for several kilometres around. The mine would "cause permanent changes to the landscape due to the construction of open pits, waste dumps and the railway, the final mine void has the potential to expose groundwater to evaporation and thereby increase salinity. Hydrocarbon spills can enter the groundwater mining plant and equipment, blasting activities and train movements will generate noise".

Nevertheless, the project was recommended by the Environmental Protection Authority for approval by the WA government. Parker and his people hoped the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee would recommend a full ethnographic survey of all indigenous sites in the creek surrounds, and provide them with answers to their concerns about long-term impact of mine dewatering on Weeli Wolli. They were disappointed.

Whatever the ACMC decision, which is still confidential, WA's then minister for Indigenous Affairs, Sheila McHale, upheld the company's application.

The early pipe laying did not damage any important sites, her office said.

Like many other West Australians, Parker was intrigued when the minister's name came up at the recent Corruption and Crime

Commission investigations into the lobbying activities of Brian Burke and Julian Grill.

In one phone surveillance tape-recording played in court on February 26, and released to the media, former WA Resources Minister John Bowler was heard meeting with his old mate, Julian Grill, once a WA mining minister himself, to reveal some discussions from the Cabinet room about the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee. It was a riveting demonstration of pragmatic politics in action and the power of the mining industry in WA.

Bowler was heard saying, "So it is expected that Sheila will overturn the ACMC decision."

Grill was then heard replying, "So Carpenter just told you that Sheila should overturn the decision?"

Bowler: "Yeah. I think he has said Sheila should overturn the decision."

Under later cross-examination, Bowler said this particular committee decision related to the Fortescue group, owned by multimillionaire Andrew Forrest.

He knew Grill was employed as his lobbyist, he said.

Soon after these and other revelations, Premier Alan Carpenter sacked Bowler, who sobbed his regrets in a parliamentary speech, claiming he had been used and betrayed.

Parker does not criticise Sheila McHale, now Minister for Disability Services, Culture and the Arts.

"She was just doing her job. She has to toe the line like everybody else in government. I think she did the best she could for us," he says.

In a letter to the mine developers, McHale gave permission for the destruction of three listed Aboriginal sites, warning that others were not to be damaged.

Strategies should be developed to "minimise impact" on these, she said, and the Weeli Wolli Creek should be regularly monitored.

The company told *The Canberra Times* that it was fully aware of its obligations over the new mine and was still exploring options for restoring the Weeli Wolli spring. Recharging the aquifer after mining was one possibility.

"Rio Tinto Iron Ore recognises its responsibilities when undertaking new developments and works with traditional landowners, local stakeholders, government and the community to deliver sustainable outcomes from its operations," the company said.