



Mr Tim Dobson
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Southern Cross Goldfields Ltd
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Our Ref 14-512340
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Dear Mr Dobson

**NOTICE UNDER SECTION 39A(3)
*Environmental Protection Act 1986***

PROPOSAL: Marda Gold Mine
LOCATION: approximately 150 km north of Southern Cross
LOCALITY: Shire of Yilgarn
PROPONENT: Southern Cross Goldfields Ltd
DECISION: Not Assessed – Public Advice Given

Thank you for your letter referring the above matter to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA).

This proposal raises a number of environmental issues. However, the EPA has decided not to subject this proposal to the environmental impact assessment process and the subsequent setting of formal conditions by the Minister for Environment under Part IV of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (EP Act). Nevertheless, the EPA provides the attached advice to you as the proponent, and other relevant authorities on the environmental aspects of the proposal.

The EPA's decision to not assess the proposal is open to appeal. There is a 14-day period, closing 25 March 2014. Information on the appeals process is available through the Office of the Appeals Convenor's website, www.appealsconvenor.wa.gov.au, or by telephoning 6467 5190.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Sutton
Director
Assessment and Compliance Division

11 March 2014

Encl

PUBLIC ADVICE UNDER SECTION 39A(7)
Environmental Protection Act 1986

MARDA GOLD PROJECT – SOUTHERN CROSS GOLDFIELDS LIMITED

SUMMARY

Southern Cross Goldfields Limited proposes to develop an open pit gold mine operation and gold processing plant 150 kilometres north of Southern Cross.

The proposal would involve mining 1.6 million tonnes (Mt) of ore and 8.2 Mt of waste rock over a life of 2.5 years at three pit locations; Marda Central, King Brown and Golden Orb. The processing plant, tailings storage facility, and two out of four of the waste rock landforms would be located at Marda Central. The remaining two waste rock landforms would be located adjacent to the King Brown and Golden Orb pits. Part of Marda Central is also located within a proposed 5(1)(h) Conservation and Mining reserve managed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW).

The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) notes that 201 public comments were received on this proposal. Most of the comments opposed the proposal and called for the proposal to be formally assessed by the EPA under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (EP Act).

The majority of environmental comments related to concerns about the impacts to the environmental values of the Mount Jackson Range and fragmentation of the Great Western Woodlands. Other concerns raised in the comments included:

- the lifespan of proposal;
- the clearing of native vegetation;
- waste management (tailings storage facility);
- potential for hydrological contamination; and
- potential impacts to visual amenity.

The EPA has considered the proposal in accordance with the requirements of the EP Act and the *Environmental Impact Assessment Administrative Procedures 2012*. In making its decision on whether to assess the proposal, the EPA considered the values of the environment, the extent of the likely impacts, policies, guidelines, procedures and standards against which a proposal can be assessed, and the presence of other statutory decision-making processes which regulate the mitigation of the potential effects on the environment (see Section 7 Significance Test Administrative Procedures).

1. Environmental Factors

The EPA has identified the following preliminary environmental factors for this proposal:

- a) Landforms;
- b) Flora and vegetation;
- c) Terrestrial fauna; and

d) Rehabilitation and closure.

2. Advice and Recommendations Regarding Environmental Factors

In considering the potential impacts to Landforms, Flora and vegetation, Terrestrial fauna, and Rehabilitation and closure, the EPA considers the potential impacts are:

- the impact to the edge of banded ironstone formations;
- the clearing of native vegetation, including two Priority 3 species;
- the impact to potential malleefowl habitat; and
- rehabilitation consistent with the proposed dual purpose Conservation and Mining Reserve.

Landforms

The pits King Brown and Marda Central are located in close proximity to the Mount Jackson Range, a Banded Ironstone Formation (BIF) range in the highest value cluster of BIF ranges in the Mount Manning area. However, the EPA notes that the proposal would not be located on, or impact BIF ridges, and that the proponent has proposed management measures including an exclusion zone to the west of the Dolly Pit at Marda Central to prevent disturbance to Priority flora and BIF communities.

The DPaW have also provided advice that they consider the risk and impact to the high conservation values associated with the range to be low.

Flora and vegetation

The EPA notes that the proposal will not be impacting on the Priority 1 flora species *Lepidosperma jacksonense*, as initially stated in the supporting referral documentation. Review of data records confirmed that there is no occurrence of *Lepidosperma jacksonense* at the location on the haul road to King Brown.

Clearing of native vegetation will be regulated by the Department of Mines and Petroleum (DMP) under the EP Act native vegetation clearing permit process.

Terrestrial fauna

It is noted that a Malleefowl Management Plan has been prepared and provided to the DPaW for review. Potential impacts to habitat of the malleefowl will be assessed and managed under the EP Act native vegetation clearing permit process administered by the DMP.

The DPaW has provided advice that it is important that appropriate vehicle speed restrictions be enforced to protect malleefowl. This can be made legally binding by the DMP through mining proposal(s) required under the *Mining Act 1978* (Mining Act).

Rehabilitation and closure

A mining proposal and mine closure plan has been provided to the DMP. Under the Mining Act, the DMP will require the proponent to submit a full mine closure plan for approval before mining can commence. The mine closure plan will need to be prepared

in accordance with the joint DMP/EPA (2011) *Guidelines for Preparing Mine Closure Plans*.

As part of the proposal is located within a proposed 5(1)(h) Conservation and Mining Reserve managed by the DPaW, in preparing the mine closure plan the proponent will need to consult with the DPaW as to the department's requirements for closure and rehabilitation. This consultation will need to commence prior to mining.

Mining will be carried out below the water table, so it is important that the mine closure plan addresses prediction, monitoring and proposed management of water quality in pit lakes which will form post-closure. It is noted that the backfilling of pits is still an option under consideration by the proponent. This matter can be addressed in the consideration of the mine closure plan required under the Mining Act.

Abstraction of groundwater associated with the proposal will be regulated by the Department of Water under the *Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914*. Disposal of water from pit dewatering will be regulated by the Department of Environment Regulation under Part V of the EP Act. Tailings and waste storage facilities are regulated by the DMP and the DER. There are no existing or potential users of groundwater in the vicinity of the mining pit and tailing storage facility.

Having regard to the small scale and short duration of the proposal, the measures taken to avoid and minimise potential impact to the BIF ridges and important flora and fauna, the EPA considers the proposal is unlikely to have a significant effect on the environment and does not warrant formal assessment. The EPA also considers that impacts to flora and fauna, and mine closure and rehabilitation can be regulated under Part V of the EP Act and Mining Act respectively.

The decision of the EPA to not assess this proposal carries no presumption about the outcome of any other statutory decision-making processes.