

A boost of confidence for mining industry

CONFIDENCE and jobs are returning to Tasmania's mining industry as the Hodgman Liberal government works to promote our mineral opportunities. The first gold pour at the Henty mine since it reopened marked a major milestone for new owners Diversified Minerals recently.

For the company, the pouring of the first gold represented the beginning of the mine providing a return on its significant investment. This is good news for the more than 120 people now employed at the mine, and for those seeking work as management ramps up production in the future.

Given the owners' commitment to employing locals, it was also welcome news for the West Coast, which shares in the benefits through the direct and indirect employment.

For the wider mining industry in Tasmania, the gold pour demonstrated that confidence and investment are returning.

Recent years have been challenging for the mining and mineral processing industry, not only in our state but across the world due to low commodity prices and - in Australia - an unfavourable exchange rate. But we are now seeing a steady improvement in the market.

From the Liberal government's perspective, we went to the last election as a strong believer in our mining industry as one of the key pillars of our economy.

This is an industry that employs more than 2000 Tasmanians and accounts for about half the value of our annual exports.

That's why we committed to a policy to back the sector and the jobs that it creates. The centrepiece of our Mining for Tasmania's Future policy was, and is, relocating Mineral Resources Tasmania to Burnie, the service hub and key export port for the industry.

This is about ensuring that the state's mining agency is better positioned to work with the industry to help attract investment and progress development, and it has the support of the industry body, the Tasmanian Minerals and Energy Council.

With 10 staff based in Burnie, along with an office of the director of mines, we are well on the way to implementing our plan.

Our Mineral Exploration Investment Attraction Plan, meanwhile, is about showcasing Tasmania's mineral opportunities to the world, recognising that we are competing for the investment dollar with not only other states but also other countries.

In the current budget, we have funded a new initiative aimed at giving the state an advantage in attracting exploration activity.

Our \$1.4 million geosciences initiative will ensure that the geological data and mapping we provide to interested mineral explorers remains world-leading.

In all, the Liberal government is investing an additional \$5 million through Mineral Resources Tasmania over this term to support the sector.

Importantly, we have also ended the land lock ups, providing greater certainty over access to resources.

The campaign by the Greens and their front groups to turn much of North-West and West Tasmania into a national park would end the prospect of new mines in spite of the fact that this is one of the most mineral-rich districts in the world.

What makes this campaign a threat is the proven willingness of the Labor Party to sacrifice industry and jobs to the Greens in return for gaining government.

Together with our investment in backing the industry, this is why we continue to say that the Liberal government is the strongest and most consistent supporter of mining.

■ Guy Barnett is the Resource Minister