

Angry miners feel shafted on Arkaroola

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Premier Mike Rann looks over the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary after he announced it is to be protected from mining. Picture: Mark Brake *Source: The Advertiser*

IN strictly political terms, the Rann Government appears to have made the right decision to protect Arkaroola.

But in economic terms, it will have a fight on its hands.

The Government has been making much of the so-called resources boom in this state and how we will be, in the future, riding on the back of ore trucks rather than the backs of sheep and cars.

The decision to protect Arkaroola for all time from the ravages of mining, however, has angered the mining industry and some of the Government's political opponents because, they say, it sends out all the wrong signals.

SA Chamber of Mines and Energy chief executive Jason Kuchel summed it up by saying: "We are deeply disturbed by the precedent of banning mining under the very Act that exists to enable mining.

"For a Government that claims to be pro-mining and pro-innovation, this announcement does not even contemplate obvious future advances in technology and processes."

The strong feeling in the mining industry is that the Arkaroola decision will act as a disincentive to further mining investment. It believes mineral investment will now seep across the borders into WA, NSW and Queensland.

Naturally, the environmental lobby, the Greens especially, are over the moon with the decision. It will certainly shore up the Government's links with the younger generation who are leaning more and more these days towards protection of the environment at all costs.

You only have to look at the growing Greens vote at both a federal and state level to realise that any government which ignores its followers does so at their own peril.

Greens preferences will be vital for Labor at the 2014 state election where it will be seeking an unprecedented fourth term. Premier Mike Rann is a canny political operator and he and his Cabinet would not have taken this decision lightly. Mineral Resources Minister Tom Koutsantonis now has been handed the poisoned chalice of having to convince the mining sector that this is a special, one-off decision and that future mineral exploration and mining operations in other areas of the state will not suffer the same fate.

Until somewhere, at some time in the future, a rare species of bird, reptile or mammal or an interesting rock formation, is found in an area where billions of dollars of minerals are also present.