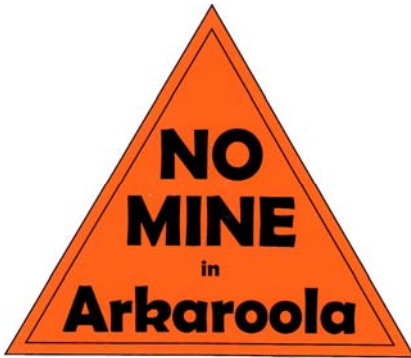


Monday 28 February 2011

Yes, or No?



SA Premier Mike Rann made a lengthy statement in parliament last week about protection for the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. The Hansard record of that statement is attached.

The Premier said "I certainly recognise the unique and sensitive environmental, cultural and heritage values of this site, which I visited last year. It is a stunning landscape, rich in flora and fauna, and I found its beauty to be compelling."

He continued "The conditional one year exploration licence for Marathon Resources ... in no way confers a right to mine."

Co-owner and manager of the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, Marg Sprigg, responded "I am delighted with the Premier's public recognition of the value of Arkaroola to the community."

Mr Rann also indicated that "the government is examining options for the future conservation management of the Arkaroola sanctuary."

He said that these options will include possible designation as a national park, although this would not necessarily preclude mining. This would also impact on the Sprigg family's continuing eco-tourism business.

Other options include listing Arkaroola on the National Heritage List and perhaps later seeking World Heritage listing, along with a ban on mining.

Marg Sprigg advised that she and her brother Doug, who jointly inherited the sanctuary from their parents, were already investigating national heritage listing.

She said that, following her father's purchase of the 610 square kilometre mountain lease in 1968 "The Sprigg family has acted as caretakers of this extraordinary wilderness for more than 40 years. Our public education and support for wide-ranging scientific research here is funded by the widely acclaimed and accredited eco-tourism business. We are determined to protect the Arkaroola environment for future generations of Australians and wish to continue managing the sanctuary."

Ms Sprigg said "nominating Arkaroola for the National Heritage List will achieve this. We will very much welcome the government's assistance with such a nomination."

Mr Rann announced that his Minister for the Environment (Paul Caica) and new Minister for Mineral Resources (Tom Koutsantonis) are to consult with native title holders, pastoral leaseholders and holders of mineral exploration licences before advising State Cabinet on how best to protect Arkaroola.

Further information: Marg Sprigg 8648 4848

Hansard, House of Assembly, SA Parliament, Monday 22 February 2011 (Extract)

The Hon. M.D. RANN (Ramsay—Premier, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Social Inclusion, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Sustainability and Climate Change) (15:03): I seek leave to make another ministerial statement.

Leave granted.

The Hon. M.D. RANN: While we are unashamedly pro mining and pro jobs, this government demands that exploration and mine development occur in a way that is sensitive to the needs of the environment and to the community. Our exploration licence and mining lease approval processes ensure that strict environmental standards are met. There is a legitimate and healthy public debate about whether, despite these strict environmental standards, specific areas of our state should be off limits for mining altogether.

That debate has manifested itself over the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, which has been raised with me repeatedly. I certainly recognise the unique and sensitive environmental, cultural and heritage values of this site, which I visited last year. It is a stunning landscape, rich in flora and fauna, and I found its beauty to be compelling.

The government renewed the conditional one-year exploration licence for Marathon Resources to explore an area within the Arkaroola sanctuary at the beginning of this month as we were legally obliged to do. It is important to note that this is an exploration licence that in no way confers a right to mine. Before the renewal was granted, the company was advised that the government is examining options for the future conservation management of the Arkaroola sanctuary.

As the company was advised, these options could include the exclusion or limiting of future mining in the environmentally sensitive area of the Arkaroola sanctuary, including areas that are subject of the company's lease. Another option is the designation of the Arkaroola sanctuary as a national park under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972, which would demonstrate a commitment to the protection and enhancement of the conservation, landscape and heritage values of Arkaroola. Although there has been some media speculation about this possible option, no decision has been made by the government. It needs to be understood that conferring national park status would not necessarily preclude mining and could leave the way open for future governments to allow mining at Arkaroola. It is suggested by the Sprigg family, operators of the Arkaroola sanctuary, that declaring the area a national park would pose serious problems for existing tourism operations at Arkaroola, whereas a definitive ban on mining could allow their tourism operations to proceed unchanged.

Another option is to have Arkaroola placed on the National Heritage List and thereafter on the World Heritage List in conjunction with a ban on mining. Such listings would reflect the significant heritage values of Arkaroola and would provide an additional level of protection to the area for all time.

We will be considering all of the available options to preserve the iconic Arkaroola sanctuary. To be clear, all options, including a definitive ban on mining at Arkaroola, are on the table. It would, however, be inappropriate for the government to make a decision like this without consulting native title holders, pastoral leaseholders, and holders of the exploration licences, not just Marathon.

The government will announce its intentions about how to best protect Arkaroola once that consultation has been completed. To this end, I have asked the Minister for Environment and Conservation and the Minister for Mineral Resources Development to lead the consultation process on the conservation management of Arkaroola. Following the consultation process, recommendations for the future management of Arkaroola will be brought to cabinet and an announcement made.