

SUNDAY MAIL 12-6-11

MP sounds out sanctuary mine

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MINING Minister Tom Koutsantonis is surveying his constituents on the future of Arkaroola, suggesting options that appear to contradict Premier Mike Rann's promises "to preserve the iconic Arkaroola sanctuary".

The West Torrens MP, also Mineral Resources Development Minister, wrote to people in his electorate on June 1 seeking their view on what should happen to the Northern Flinders Ranges wilderness now being explored by Marathon Resources for its uranium deposits.

The Government is currently consulting on the area's future – a process for which Mr Koutsantonis has oversight – following considerable debate and a *Sunday Mail* poll in February which found 72 per cent of people opposed mining in the area.

In his letter, Mr Koutsantonis described the region as "an area of unique scenic beauty with sensitive environmental, cultural and heritage values".

He then outlined the area's mineral wealth saying "placing a ban on exploration



and mining ... would lock away these significant resources now and in the future".

The minister then proposed three options: a complete ban on mining; future mining using "appropriate and environmentally sensitive methods"; and permitting mining with "stringent controls". In Parliament on February 22, Premier Mike Rann clearly favoured protections for Arkaroola while saying "all options, including a definitive ban on mining at Arkaroola, are on the table".

The Upper House has passed a Greens motion calling on the Government to permanently protect the mountains of Arka-

roola from mining. Greens MP Mark Parnell said: "The Premier said we have to work out how to protect Arkaroola but Mr Koutsantonis is saying protection is just one option and the other two options are digging it up.

"It also puts the people of West Torrens in the privileged position of being singled out for direct consultation with the minister on what is a state-wide issue."

Mr Koutsantonis said early responses showed about half the residents supported a mining ban and the people of West Torrens represented a broad, cross section of South Australians.

"They are the people who put me into parliament as their local MP and I want to hear their thoughts on this very important issue – it is one of the most important decisions I will make as a minister," he said.

Exploration results indicate Arkaroola has the nation's fifth largest undeveloped uranium deposit around Mt Gee, but the actual extent has not been assessed.

Arkaroola's operators, the Sprigg family, is opposed to mining in the region, saying the ancient landscapes, rare flora and fauna, unique geology and sheer beauty of the area are incompatible with mining.