

Queensland Department of Mines and Energy have revealed that more than 1000 applications for mining exploration have been stalled due to State Government policy not to grant any licenses or permits over any land that is not under freehold title. DME Director of resource development said that companies had switched their attention to land over which they already hold leases. *(CM, 8 Jan, p23)*

South Australia

Manna Hill Mining Company confirmed it had become the first mining company in South Australia to be granted a mining lease on pastoral land since the Wik decision after successful negotiations with three native title claimant groups – from the Kuyani and Adnyamathanba people - over land north of Manna Hill. The agreement includes training and employment and royalties. *(Ad, 16 Jan, p5)**

AMENDMENTS

The Executive Director of Minerals Council criticised Labor's alternative Amendment package. *(Media Release, 1 Dec)*

The Senate blocked the Governments proposed six-year sunset clause, a key element of the 10-point plan, with the support of Senator Harradine. *(Aus, 2 Dec, p1)**

The National Farmer's Federation is planning a series of test cases regardless of whether the Amendment Bill eventually passes the Senate. *(SMH, 3 Dec, p10)*

Leader of the Opposition, Mr Kim Beazley, National Indigenous Working Group spokesperson Peter Yu, and Cape York Land Council Chair Noel Pearson, announced that Labor would support an amendment to confirm protection of freehold properties, but argued that the High Court had already protected them. *(WA, 5 Dec, p4)**

On 1 January, the Australian Archives released Cabinet Records from 1967, which include records of the 1967 Referendum. These documents may be relevant in light of the foreshadowed challenge to the Native Title Amendment Bill, if passed. The government claimed that the papers support their view, that the constitutional power to make laws for the people of any race can be used prejudicially. *(FinR, 6 Jan, p10)** Others have argued that the documents clearly reveal that non-discrimination was the primary purpose behind the referendum and was certainly the basis upon which the public campaign was put. *(Age, 7 Jan, p A11)*

Acting Prime Minister, Mr Tim Fischer, released a government document called 'Native Title Made Easy', setting out the government's ten point plan. The document has been criticised for restating inaccurate and inflammatory statements about land open to claim, impacts on mining and resources industry, and funds spent on social services for Indigenous peoples. *(Age, 12 Jan, pA3)**

The government also released 'Native Title: On the Record, the rhetoric and the reality'. The document contains quotes from the debates of 1993, which it is argued support the

government position on the Amendment Bill. Launching the document, Acting Prime Minister, Mr Tim Fischer, was particularly critical of Noel Pearson. (*CT, 15 Jan, p3*) In response, the Opposition noted Mr Fischer's comments during the same period, which suggested that the status of pastoral leases was not certain. (*Age, 15 Jan, pA8*)

Acting Prime Minister, Mr Tim Fischer has stated that the government's efforts toward reconciliation would begin again if the Amendment Bill were to pass the senate. (*SMH, 15 Jan, p5*)*

The Labor Party National Conference passed a motion put by the Leader of the Opposition which resolved to oppose the Government's Bill when reintroduced to the Senate. The Leader, Mr Kim Beazley, said that the first act of a Labor government if elected would be to bring all the interested parties together for roundtable talks until a resolution was reached. (*Aus, 22 Jan, pH4*)*

In a concession to the concerns of state Labor leaders and the mining industry the National Conference agreed to amend their policy to support changes to the *Native Title Act* that would allow the automatic renewal of mining leases where there were no changes to the terms of the lease. (*WA, 22 Jan, p6*)*

GENERAL NATIVE TITLE ISSUES

Aboriginal leaders boycotted talks with the Prime Minister John Howard in protest at his handling of native title issues. (*Age, 13 Dec, p7*)*

The Canadian Supreme Court decision in *Delgamuukw v British Columbia*, 11 December 1997, overturned a lower court ruling to hold that the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Nations held Aboriginal title in their traditional land (58,000 sq. km). A new trial was also granted to determine issues of self-government rights because the judge had failed to give sufficient weight to the oral histories and evidence of the plaintiffs. Attention has focused on the fact that the court concluded that Aboriginal title encompasses rights to minerals. (*CM, 5 Jan, p4*)* Special Minister for State, Senator Nick Minchin also highlighted the mineral rights aspect of the decision and said that the preliminary assessment of the case was that it would have no ramifications for Australia. (*Ad, 9 Jan, p7*)*

Wayne Lonergan, of Coopers and Lybrand has produced a report examining the economic impact of native title on industry revenue. The report suggests that as much as \$30 billion of mining investment opportunities have been lost. Lonergan has suggested that even if the Amendment Bill were passed, \$20 billion would still be lost. An Access Economics study also seeks to evaluate projects subject to native title. (*Aus, 7 Jan, p5*)* It has been pointed out many of these projects are not delayed while other have been delayed by commodity prices and other market influences, not native title. (*SH, 11 Jan, p61*)* Figures also suggest that despite the claims in these reports, new mining developments in Australia in the last financial year showed an increase. (*Age, 23 Jan, p. A6*)*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Michael Dodson ended his term on 17 January. In his final press conference Mr Dodson strongly criticised the