

Statement of Reasons

ABM RESOURCES NL – TANAMI EXPLORATION PROJECT

PROJECT

The Mining Management Plan (MMP) for the Tanami Exploration Project (the Project) was referred by the Department of Primary Industry and Resources (DPIR) to the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA) on 26 April 2017 for consideration under the *Environmental Assessment Act* (EA Act). Additional information was provided to the NT EPA on 17 June 2017.

ABM Resources NL (the Proponent) proposes to undertake exploration activities on seven exploration leases (EL31291, EL23659, EL27119, EL31290, EL27589, EL26628, EL29860) in the Tanami region approximately 600 km north-west of Alice Springs. The closest major settlements to the Project are Halls Creek in Western Australia (approximately 260 km north-west) and Yuendumu (approximately 360 km south-east).

Exploration activities would target gold and drilling up to 636 holes is proposed. The majority of holes (550) would be Shallow Rotary Air Blast (RAB) drilled to a maximum depth of 30 m. A further 71 holes would be RAB drilled to a maximum depth of 90 m. Reverse Circulation (RC) drilling to a maximum depth of 250 m would account for 15 of the holes. Only RC drilling would require the construction of a drill pad and the total drill pad footprint is estimated to be 1.03 ha. Sumps to collect groundwater that may be encountered during deeper RC drilling may also be required (60 m³ [0.006 ha] total), however holes would be terminated if significant groundwater is encountered as the quality of the collected sample would be compromised.

Aquifers (confined and unconfined) will be avoided due to their location away from preferred drilling locations and/or the cost and limitations of the drilling techniques proposed.

The clearing and construction of a total of 18 km of new access tracks/lines (5.4 ha) is proposed. Clearing is also proposed to establish two temporary workers camps (0.5 ha in total). The total area of disturbance for the Project is estimated to be 6.93 ha.

Holes would be plugged on completion of drilling and rehabilitation would commence following the receipt and confirmation of sample laboratory results. Rehabilitation will be completed within 12 months and progress monitored a further 6 – 12 months thereafter.

DPIR referred the Project to the NT EPA due to the Project being located within the South-west Tanami Site of Conservation Significance. Exploration leases EL27589, EL31291, EL27119 and EL31290 also intersect the Bluebush Hills Site of Botanical Significance.

The land is Aboriginal freehold with existing uses including pastoral operations and mining.

Exploration activities are expected to be completed in 2017.

CONSULTATION

The MMP has been reviewed as a notification under the EA Act in consultation with Northern Territory Government (NTG) advisory bodies and the responsible Minister, in accordance with clause 8(1) of the Environmental Assessment Administrative Procedures.

JUSTIFICATION

Review of the MMP identified potential impacts to terrestrial fauna from vegetation clearing and habitat disturbance as the key environmental factor, with other potential impacts being aquifer contamination, weeds, social effects and inadequate rehabilitation.

NTG advisory bodies advised that the project area is highly likely to support threatened fauna listed as Vulnerable under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* (TPWC Act) and/or the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The following species have all been recorded within, or within 10 km of the exploration leases:

- *Dasyercus blythi* (brush-tailed mulgara)(TPWC Act)
- *Macrotis lagotis* (greater bilby) (EPBC Act and TPWC Act)
- *Falco hypoleucos* (grey falcon) (TPWC Act)
- *Polytelis alexandrae* (princess parrot)(EPBC Act and TPWC Act)

Most of the project area is situated on sandplain, which is potentially suitable habitat for these threatened species. Three of the species (greater bilby, grey falcon and princess parrot) are wide ranging with low site-fidelity, and the brush-tailed mulgara occurs widely throughout the Tanami Desert and in other desert regions. The NT EPA considers that significant impacts are unlikely due to the small area of vegetation clearing proposed (6.93 ha) and the identification of appropriate and adequate mitigation measures, including:

- use of existing tracks to reduce vegetation clearing requirements
- restricting driving at night to reduce risks to nocturnal fauna (particularly the greater bilby)
- identifying and avoiding significant vegetation and areas where signs of threatened fauna activity are detected (e.g. burrows of the greater bilby and brush-tailed mulgara)
- rehabilitating sites on completion of exploration activities.

The NT EPA therefore considers the likelihood of significant impacts to populations of threatened species from the Project to be low.

The risk of aquifer contamination will be managed by drilling ceasing if significant groundwater is encountered, and by backfilling and sealing boreholes in accordance with Department of Primary Industry and Resources (DPIR) requirements.

A weed management program and rehabilitation program will form part of the Environmental Management Plan (EMP) for the project and be regulated by the DPIR.

The project will require separate approvals by traditional owners and the pastoral operator.

The NT EPA considers that potential environmental impacts and risks associated with the Project can be adequately managed through the authorisation process under the *Mining Management Act* and the implementation of mitigation measures detailed in the EMP. Comments from NTG advisory bodies have been provided to the Proponent and the NT EPA has provided recommendations to ensure that potential impacts on the environment are minimised and obligations under relevant legislation can be met.

DECISION

The proposed action, which was referred to the NT EPA by the DPIR, has been examined by the NT EPA and preliminary investigations and inquiries conducted. The NT EPA has decided that the potential environmental impacts and risks of the proposed action are not so significant as to warrant environmental impact assessment by the NT EPA under provisions of the *Environment Assessment Act*. However, the proposed action will require assessment and approvals under the *Mining Management Act* to ensure the environmental issues associated with the proposed action are effectively managed.

This decision is made in accordance with clause 8(2) of Environmental Assessment Administrative Procedures, and subject to clause 14A the administrative procedures are at an end with respect to the proposed action.



DR PAUL VOGEL
CHAIR

NORTHERN TERRITORY ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY

29 JUNE 2017