POLITICS AHEAD OF PROCESS

March 06th, 2012

The Henderson Government's blanket ban on sea bed mining and exploration undermines the Territory's sovereign risk and is a knee-jerk reaction to issues associated with exploration in waters off Groote Eylandt.

Deputy Opposition Leader, Kezia Purick, said the blanket ban is a political decision because there is no chance any seabed mining activity will take place in Territory waters over the next three years.

Just a few weeks ago the Chief Minister told Parliament the environmental bar on seabed mining is so high, it is extremely unlikely any projects will be approved in the first place.

“But today, Resources Minister Kon Vatskalis tried to scare Territorians with his melodramatic references to broad-scale mining,” Ms Purick said.

“Broad-scale mining is a figment of the Minister's imagination.

“The Government should deal with exploration applications on a case-by-case basis, but instead has dispensed with due process in an election year.

“The blanket ban is a political fix and an over-reaction to a bid by Perth-based company Northern Manganese to explore off the coast of Groote Eylandt.

“If the Chief Minister is right and the environmental bar on such projects is too high, Northern Manganese won’t get its exploration application through the environmental approval process.

“This makes the blanket ban unnecessary.”

Ms Purick said the moratorium was full of holes, most notably its exemption on port developments so the Marine Supply Base can proceed.

“It’s okay for the Labor Government to dredge the harbour, but not for the private sector to explore for minerals.

“Government ministers have spent hundreds-of-thousands of dollars travelling
the world telling mining companies the Territory is ‘open for business’.

“The blanket ban sends out a very strong signal to the national and international business community that the Henderson Government will put politics ahead of process.

“Labor’s politically risk averse approach to mining and exploration threatens to slam the door shut on another industry that could provide jobs and boost economic growth across the Territory.”

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