McArthur River decision exposes deep flaws in the Territory’s approval process

The announcement last night by the Government has on the one hand created a window of opportunity for the McArthur River Mine but on the other hand has caused further uncertainty.

“The process to date has shown that there are deep and fundamental flaws in the approval system and those flaws still have the capacity to hurt mining in the Territory.” Jodeen Carney said.

“Either the EPA is flawed, as was the advice that it provided to the minister, or the minister was wrong. Either way this has been a mess and raises more questions than it answers.

“There are 3 new applications for mines before the EPA at the moment. How can any of the companies whose future developments are reliant on the EPA’s approval have any confidence in the review process?

“The Government’s handling of this whole affair has been a dog’s breakfast. The reputation of the Territory as a place to do business for the mining industry has been deeply scarred and it appears that the only way to make Government exercise common sense is by engaging in very expensive public advertising campaigns.

“This is hardly the way the process should work.

“The leadership vacuum that this process exposed is also of concern. The Chief Minister and her Ministers have been ducking and weaving their public responsibilities and as a consequence people have been staring down the barrel of unemployment without any comfort from Government whatsoever.

“It is time for the Government to fix up the mess they created when they established the EPA in its current form. They have given it the big thumbs down but it is a creature of their own making. They have effectively given the organisation a vote of no confidence and it is time for them to fix it.

“Under the CLP the mining industry would be expected to act in an environmentally sensitive way but we would not cause the pain that this Government has caused to all who have been affected by this.

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“Xstrata has not been given a fair go. The existing mine has now three days left of operational work and stock piles are limited to one month. After that there is nothing for the mine to do.

“By waiting for such a long time the Government has now made this a time critical issue for the mine.

“The gutlessness of this Minister in making this sort of determination means that they are trying to make McArthur River Mine the villain in this story if the Mine cannot go ahead under the new conditions.

“Government should be about leadership and what we have is a smoke and mirrors disappearing act by the people who should be saying that the buck stops with them.

“I hope that Xstrata can see its way to complying with these conditions for the sake of the Territory and the people who work for them. Sadly, I don't expect they'll be championing the Territory as an easy place to do business.”