



Environment counter-attack

Green group files appeal

JOSH BURROWS

THE battle between Sinosteel-Midwest and the Conservation Council over the Koolanooka and Blue Hills iron ore project cranked into full-gear this week.

Both organisations lodged appeals against the EPA's recommendations to allow Sinosteel-Midwest to mine Koolanooka and Mungada West but to turn Mungada East into an A-Class reserve.

Council spokesman Tim Nicol said the environmental group was trying to block all mining activity in the area.

He said Sinosteel-Midwest had neglected to acknowledge the region's rich biodiversity.

"Sinosteel-Midwest has shown contempt for the environmental assessment process in their approach to this proposal," he said.

"A combination of the lack of some key environmental data, the refusal to address cumulative impacts, and the lack of responses to some key questions from government agencies and community, has been well below accepted practice.

"How can they say the State's environmental watchdog has based its information on ideology and is not sensible? And that their opinion is more important?"



Sinosteel-Midwest has shown contempt for the environmental assessment process in their approach to this proposal

—CONSERVATION COUNCIL
SPOKESMAN TIM NICOL

Mr Nicol said the three sites need to be protected because they were home to rare and endemic flora and fauna species.

"They want the Government to overturn the EPA advice. As a consequence the areas that need protection from mining won't ever be protected," he said.

"The possible effects is that there will be damage done to the rare and endangered plants and animals and the worst-case scenario is that we'll end up with extinctions."

Sinosteel-Midwest Corporation chief operating officer Giulio Casello said fewer than 0.5 per cent

of rare species would be affected, and the offshoots of the mine would benefit the environment.

"The area has previously been mined before in the 1960s, and will be better after we've finished mining because that area has never been rehabilitated," he said.

"We've proposed an area of 5270 hectares should be set aside for conservation and a second site near Koolanooka of around 3000 hectares and fence it off from feral animals."

Mr Casello said Sinosteel-Midwest had been in the community for four years and had injected \$30 million into the project.

He said without the Mungada East site the project would not be economical because that pit had the largest and highest concentrate of iron ore.

Agricultural regional MLA Brian Ellis has also waded into the debate.

He said the project would translate into local jobs and bring social and economic benefits to the region.

"The EPA have dug their heels in the ground and are trying to protect an area which has already been mined," Mr Ellis said.

"I'm seeking a meeting with the Environment Minister [Donna Faragher] to put Sinosteel's case forward."