

PUBLIC MEETING. COOBER PEDY OPAL FIELDS

THURSDAY, MAY 17th, 8 P.M.

At the invitation of the Director of Mines, a meeting was held of the Coober Pedy Progress Association and interested miners on the field for the purposes of bringing forward problems and complaints relating to the opal mining industry.

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Traeger, Chairman of the local Progress Association, who introduced the Director of Mines and briefly explained the purpose of his visit. Thirty-one people attended the meeting.

The Director explained that following a Government directive to investigate all aspects of the opal industry he was making a visit to both opal fields to gain a brief insight into conditions prevailing on both fields. This visit was of a fleeting nature only, but Mr. Willington, Mining Engineer, Department of Mines, would later return and investigate in detail all aspects and problems relating to the industry.

The Director outlined various ways in which he thought the Department could be of assistance to the opal producers.

- a. When time and opportunity permitted a Geological Survey of the Coober Pedy field could be carried out, similar to that undertaken at Andamooka.
- b. The Mines Inspection Branch could be of service in advising on mining methods, safety practice, explosives usage, and field hygiene.
- c. The offer was made that if the Progress Association so desired it, an explosives school could be arranged on the field as had been done elsewhere in South Australia by the Department of Mines.
- d. The Government must also investigate the marketing, sales, and royalty question on opal.

This visit would be followed by a further visit of Mr. Willington; officers of the Mines Inspection Branch and more frequent visits by Mining Wardens. It was hoped that this survey

of the industry would be completed within six months.

The Director then threw the meeting open to any questions that may be raised by miners or other interested parties.

Question: Did the Director represent the Commonwealth or
(Mr. Wake) State Government? The water question at Coober Pedy is becoming very acute; the field was accepting unemployed from Adelaide; local residents were becoming alarmed at this influx and it would appear that the Government was doing nothing to alleviate the problem.

Answer: The Chairman intervened to correct the statement regarding Government help and outlined the assistance given in the construction of water supply tanks and the current cartage of water to the field.

Question: Even if the existing water tanks were full, this would give six to seven months supply only for the present field population.

Answer: The Engineering and Water Supply Department is the authority responsible for all surface water supplies. Mines Department responsible for underground supplies till delivered at surface then E. & W. S. takes over.

The most recent test bore sunk at Coober Pedy by the Mines Department had reached 800 feet, cutting three supplies of very saline water. This was about the economic depth limit of the percussion plant used.

The question of testing deeper was another issue. The prospects of finding good quality water were considered poor.

The Government had under consideration the purchase of a sizeable rotary drill to assist the oil search by sinking test bores to perhaps 4 - 5000ft. If such a drill was purchased, possibly an oil test hole could be sunk at Coober Pedy, which would also clarify the deep-seated water possibilities. However, there was nothing definite at this stage.

Question: What is the present tank capacity?
(Director)

Answer: Half a million gallons.
(Mr. Wake)

Director: There appear to be two practical alternatives:
(1) a deep bore in which the prospects of obtaining suitable water are not encouraging, and
(2) an alternative tank site.

Mr. Wolenski Suggested an additional tank site as being preferable.

The Chairman: Stated - the Progress Association will assist by voluntary labor, the provision of bulldozers and equipment to assist in such work.

Question: Could solar evaporation be adapted on the field?

Answer: It has been used in other countries, it is not cheap, and I am not sure it would be practicable at Coober Pedy but would be worth considering, at least on a research basis.

- Chairman: This was investigated several years ago, the cost appeared to be too great.
- Director: Apart from water supply, are there any other questions.
- Question: Could the main road to the field be improved?
- Answer: E. & W. S. are the responsible authority for road maintenance in the district.
- Question: Could the telephone service be improved? At present a land line comes as far as Ingomar Station.
- (Mr. Wake)
- Chairman: Added that the opal industry was revenue producing, therefore the Government should assist in providing such services.
- Answer: As far as the State is concerned, the Government receives no revenue whatever from opal beyond the miner's right fee of 5/- and 2/6 for claim registration.
- Reply: The Government receives revenue indirectly in indirect taxation, such as that levied on beer, motor cars, other commodities etc. Also quite a number of unemployed from the cities are absorbed here. Therefore, the Government do get revenue. It must be remembered that three-quarters of a million pounds of opal was won from the fields last year.
- (Mr. Wake)
- Question: What is the position regarding income tax? Could tax be spread over good and bad years?
- Director: This matter will be taken up, and the field advised of income tax position.
- Question: With the high cost of living, in my case, a wife, four children and operating expenses cost me £30 per week. The living cost factor should be taken into account in assessing income tax.
- General opinion: Cost of living for one man was approximately £12 per week plus explosives. Examples of commodity prices cited were: cement 30/- a bag, eggs 7/- a dozen, butter 7/- a pound, potatoes 2/6 a pound, petrol 5/6 per gallon.
- Question: Is there any Government assistance to prospectors nowadays?
- Answer: Yes, depending upon the merits of the case. For example in the development of a new and original opal field, the Government could consider hiring mining equipment such as compressors, drills and winches at nominal hire rates.
- Question: Can unemployment benefits be drawn on the field?
- Answer: I am not in a position to answer that question.
- Question: Can opal miners be grub staked (as regards equipment).
- Answer: No reason why not, provided the equipment is available and the Government is prepared to assist. Such arrangement, however, would probably apply only to the development or exploration of new fields. For example, say, a new field 30 miles out from Coober Pedy might be considered worthy of help.

- Question: (Mr. Wake) It would be a great help if a resident officer with both police and Warden powers could live on the field.
- Answer: This is a matter for the Police Commissioner or Chief Secretary to decide. I do not know the requirements before a police officer is established in the district.
- Question: (Mr. Wake) Small places like Kingoonya, Tarcoola and Kulgera, warrant a police officer, why not Coober Pedy?
- Statement: (Mr. Sherman) Although the opal market was as present affected by the credit squeeze in Japan, for example some of his customers were now asking for 120 days credit, in general the demand for opal exceeded the supply. The matter of establishing a market in Red China was very difficult due to internal political controls.
- Mr. Sherman's policy was to sell to the best bidder. At present there is a firm open world market which he considered as the best and most healthy state for the marketing of opal.
- Question: (Director) If say, several additional opal fields were found, would there be over supply?
- Answer: Both Messrs. Sherman and Wake stated definitely no.
- Question: Does the Government want an increase in production of opal?
- Answer: The policy of the Department of Mines is to encourage and assist mineral production generally in South Australia. The Government's attitude to the opal industry will probably be assisted by our current review.
- Question: (Mr. Wake) Could both the Federal and State Governments co-operate in the survey of the industry now being undertaken.
- Answer: On the technical level co-operation and liasion with the Federal Government, that is the Bureau of Mineral Resources, is excellent. I am not in a position to answer on the political level.
- Question: Could the Tourist Bureau assist in the matter of road improvement because of the increased tourist traffic through the opal fields to Alice Springs?
- Answer: I will take up this matter with the Tourist Bureau.
- Question: Could a central explosives depot be established at Coober Pedy. There are probably 50 to 60 fifty pound cases of 60% gelignite consumed per week. Local prices are explosives £10/10/- per case, detonators £1 per hundred, fuse, 200 ft. coils £2/5/-. Both general stores in Coober Pedy have a licence to deal in explosives. Possibly a central depot would reduce the cost of explosives on the field.
- Answer: I will refer this matter to our Mines Inspection Branch.
- Question: One month is not enough time to register a claim. At least two months are required. Many present supported this request.

Answer: For a claim holders own protection it would be
(Mr. Willington) wise to affect registration of a claim at the
same time as pegging. The claim holder then
had full legal right to his claim for the
total outlay of 2/6 plus a 5d. postage stamp
covering his application for registration.
The Department did not favour a long period
between pegging of a claim and ultimate
registration.

Comment: A claim systematically worked out would last a
(Mr. Wake) party of two men at least three years.

The Director of Mines summed up the main problems raised
which appeared to be an adequate water supply, the matter of
explosives costs on the field, and the arranging of an explosives
usage course.

The meeting closed at 9.50 p.m. on a vote of thanks
from Mr. Linsky.

CMW:MIP
25.5.62

C. M. WILLINGTON
MINING ENGINEER

PUBLIC MEETING - ANDAMOOKA OPAL FIELDS - SUNDAY MAY 20, 1962, AT 7.30

At the invitation of the Director of Mines, a public meeting sponsored by the Andamooka Progress Association was held in the Community Hall.

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Eric Carter, Chairman, A.P.A., who introduced the Director of Mines.

The Secretary and Treasurer, Mr. F. Schulten, members of the A.P.A. Committee and approximately 70 interested miners were present.

The Chairman introduced the Director of Mines to the meeting who explained in the same terms as the Coober Pedy meeting that because of a Government directive to investigate all aspects of the opal industry, he was visiting both fields to acquaint himself first-hand with existing conditions. Admittedly, the visit was of a fleeting nature but Mr. Willington, Mining Engineer, would later return when opportunity offered and more fully investigate the field aspects of the industry at both Coober Pedy and Andamooka.

The Director explained that the Department of Mines could be of service to the industry in a number of ways, e.g. more detailed geological advice, technical advice on mining methods, safety practice, explosives usage and field hygiene. The offer was also made to run an explosives school, if so desired, to assist new and inexperienced miners in the safe handling and correct usage of explosives.

Inclusive in the survey to be carried out by Mr. Willington would be the matter of opal sales, marketing and royalties. It was hoped that this survey would be completed in six months. Mr. Willington would shortly be returning to the field and it would be appreciated if individual miners would assist him in this work.

The Director then threw the meeting open for questions, complaints and problems which he invited miners to bring forward.

- QUESTION: In the matter of claim amalgamation, e.g. where four claims are amalgamated, are four men essential to fulfil the labour requirement or does machinery horsepower also account? Furthermore, must the claims comprise a square or is the contiguity of claim boundaries immaterial?
- ANSWER: Horsepower counts.
Second part of question will be referred to the Mining Warden.
- QUESTION: When will the geological plan, that is, a 4 mile or 8-mile sheet of Andamooka be available?
- ANSWER: There is the local plan of the Andamooka field contained in Nixon's report M. R. 109 which is available. The regional geological plan, however, is a long way off and no definite date can be given for printing. I will endeavour to have it speeded up, although it will probably not be in sufficient detail to assist opal prospecting much.
- QUESTION: Could the Department of Mines do some diamond drilling on the field and provide typical core samples for public display to assist miners on the field in locating the opal horizons?
- ANSWER: Such a question needs consideration. The best prospecting method would not necessarily be diamond drilling. The outlay for such work could hinge upon the life of the field - at present unknown.
- QUESTION: To determine the life of the field would largely depend upon the assistance given by the Department of Mines. Why cannot we have this assistance?
- ANSWER: The State Government receives nothing beyond Miner's Right fees (5/-) and Claim Registration fees (2/6) from the field; an insignificant amount to warrant heavy expenditure.
- QUESTION: In a bore sunk by the Department at White Dam, opal was allegedly found. What were the results?
- ANSWER: The Department subsequently sank a shaft but no traces of opal were found.

At this stage, during a lull in the meeting, the Chairman urged that whilst interested parties had the opportunity to do so, would they now please air their problems as this was the specific purpose of the meeting.

- QUESTION: What is the present water position on the field?
(D. of M.)
- ANSWER: It stinks - not fit to drink - suggest it be analysed to see if fit for human consumption.
Many at the meeting vociferously supported this view.
What action is now being taken about water supply?
Six weeks ago E. & W. S. officer cancelled the carting of water from Woomera.

STATEMENT: We have four wells and one bore on Opal Creek and the supply is as follows:

Cougers No. 1 Well	100 gallons a day
" " 2 "	10 " " "
" " 3 "	5 to 600 gallons a day
" " 4 "	120 to 150 " " "
Barnes No. 1 Well	120 to 150 " " "

The combined yield of these wells amounts to 600 to 900 gallons per 24 hours, i.e. 6,000-7,000 gallons per week to supply 650 people, which is equivalent to about 10 gallons per head per week.

ANSWER: (D. of M.) To-day I have marked out several trial bore sites at the Three Mile Dam. Authority to drill these bores depends upon E. & W. S. who are responsible for water supply. However, I shall advise that the water position is serious. The alternative would be the construction of dams. This, however, is an E. & W. S. matter and again will depend upon the life of the field.

QUESTION: Could the water storage tanks ex Radium Hill be re-erected at Andamooka to provide storage in lean times?

ANSWER: (Mr. Schulten) Due to the high mineral content of the water, Mr. Schulten did not consider metal tanks suitable. He stated that Cougers No. 3 tank had corroded away completely in five years.

Mr. Schulten stated that as the Government were prepared to aid the salt industry why not similar assistance to the opal industry, particularly in the matter of water supply. He suggested that North Well six miles away would be a valuable water supply if it could be made available from the pastoral interests.

Salt industry pays royalty for 3d - 6d per ton. Question of utilising North Well would be looked into.

QUESTION: Why can't we have a pipeline from Woomera (75 miles) similar to that provided to Radium Hill from Broken Hill?

ANSWER: Radium Hill has returned £17 million to State Government - Andamooka virtually nothing. Very heavy cost involved in pipelines.

QUESTION: What specific safety rules are laid down for the opal fields?

ANSWER: Safety regulations for all mining purposes are set out in the Mines and Works Inspection Act and Regulations. We have an Inspection Branch to attend to this aspect.

QUESTION: (D. of M.) How often do you think Mines Inspectors should visit the field? On more frequent occasions than at present?

ANSWER: (Meeting unanimous) Yes. Once a month at least.

- QUESTION: What voltage and what type of cable is permissible for the operation of electric powered augers underground? Also who is the authority for inspecting such electrical equipment?
- ANSWER: Normally a Mines Inspection Branch matter but this will be checked to see if the Factories and Steam Boilers Inspectors are concerned.
- QUESTION: Some people hold more than one claim and these are not worked. How do we get redress? Some men have four or five claims taken out in different names.
- ANSWER: Illegally held claims are a matter for the Warden. Your means of redress for acquisition of illegally held claims is by lodging a plaint note with the Warden.
- SUGGESTION: Mr. Schulten suggested that a £10 bond or registration fee be introduced for claim registration to set as a deterrent to the holding of more than one claim.
- QUESTION: Andamooka Enterprises hold half of Horse Paddock Hill: we want to work it. Can it be made available?
- ANSWER: The matter of continuance or cancellation of the Special Mining Lease in question is now under consideration.
- QUESTION: What is the position regarding Special Mining Leases on new ground, i.e. new opal fields?
- ANSWER: The Minister of Mines decides the granting of such leases on their merits.
- QUESTION: Will the cancellation of Andamooka Enterprises leases be promulgated?
- ANSWER: Yes. The decision arrived at will be advised in a manner fair to all concerned. Not yet decided how it will be done. Anyone, however, is at liberty to purchase a copy of the Government Gazette in which cancellations etc. are promulgated.
- QUESTION: (Regarded as most important by all concerned). What happens when mining operations extend outside of claim boundaries?
- ANSWER: Provided sufficient proof is available, I think the Warden has power to cancel the offender's claim; redress, however, for allegedly "poached" opal is a matter for civil action.
- QUESTION: Is there a subsidy for prospecting?
- ANSWER: Yes. Consideration is given to the prospecting of new or original fields. This also depends upon the mineral sought, whether it be of strategic value or not, e.g. uranium. I am not, however, in favour of grubstaking as a straight hand-out.
- QUESTION: Could a police post be established at Andamooka?
- ANSWER: This is a matter for the Police Department?

QUESTION: Could the Mines Department agitate for us in the establishment of a police post?

ANSWER: I will endeavour to support your request but suggest the proper avenue of approach would be for the A.P.A. to write directly to the Chief Secretary.

QUESTION: What advantage would there be to us on the field if Andamooka was declared a mining field?

ANSWER: I cannot answer direct but will have this matter looked into.

STATEMENT:

(Mr. L. Malone, J.P.
from Woomera) outlined some recent civil disturbances on the field and stated that in his view it was most essential that a police officer be established on the field otherwise a tragedy is likely to occur, particularly with the indiscriminate use of fire-arms.

The Director of Mines then summed up the main points raised during the meeting and asked that on Mr. Willington's return co-operation and assistance be extended to aid in this survey of the industry.

Meeting closed 9 p.m.

25.5.62

C.M. WILLINGTON
MINING ENGINEER