



Clearing Permit Decision Report

1. Application details

1.1. Permit application details

Permit application No.: 6832/4
Permit type: Purpose Permit

1.2. Proponent details

Proponent's name: **Big Bell Gold Operations Pty Ltd**

1.3. Property details

Property:
Mining Lease 51/6
Mining Lease 51/12
Mining Lease 51/31
Mining Lease 51/33
Mining Lease 51/75
Mining Lease 51/96
Mining Lease 51/203
Mining Lease 51/321
Mining Lease 51/486
Mining Lease 51/496
Mining Lease 51/572
Mining Lease 51/575
Mining Lease 51/581
Mining Lease 51/793
Mining Lease 51/794
Prospecting Licence 51/3071
Local Government Area: Shire of Meekatharra
Colloquial name: Lake Annean Exploration

1.4. Application

Clearing Area (ha)	No. Trees	Method of Clearing	For the purpose of:
12		Mechanical Removal	Mineral Exploration and Pipeline

1.5. Decision on application

Decision on Permit Application: Grant
Decision Date: 21 January 2021

2. Site Information

2.1. Existing environment and information

2.1.1. Description of the native vegetation under application

Vegetation Description Beard vegetation associations have been mapped for the whole of Western Australia and are useful to look at vegetation in a regional context. The following four vegetation associations have been mapped within the application area (GIS Database):

18: Low woodland; mulga (*Acacia aneura*);

39: Shrublands; mulga scrub;

125: Bare areas; salt lakes; and

1128: Mosaic: Succulent steppe with open scrub; scattered *Acacia sclerosperma* and bowgada over saltbush and bluebush/Succulent steppe; samphire.

A Level 1 flora survey of the application area was undertaken by MWH between 14 and 17 July 2015. The following vegetation associations were recorded within the permit area (MWH, 2015):

VA01: Scattered shrubs of *Maireana pyramidata* and *Cratystylis subspinescens* over low chenopod shrubland of *Maireana tomentosa*, *Maireana triptera* and *Dissocarpus paradoxus* over scattered low tussock grassland of *Aristida contorta* on red/brown sandy, clay loam.

VA02a: Scattered tall shrubs of *Acacia pteraneura* and *Acacia tetragonophylla* over scattered mid shrubs of *Senna* sp. Meekatharra (E. Bailey 1-26) and *Senna artemisioides* subsp. *helmsii* over open low shrubland of *Maireana triptera*, *Eremophila ? jucunda* subsp. *jucunda* and *Ptilotus obovatus* over very open low tussock grassland of *Aristida contorta* on red/brown loamy sand with stony surface.

VA02b: Scattered tall shrubs of *Acacia pteraneura* over open low chenopod shrubland of *Maireana pyramidata*, *Maireana triptera* and *Rhagodia eremaea* over very open low tussock grassland of *Aristida contorta* on red/brown stony, loamy sand with stony surface.

VA03: Mosaic of mid to tall samphire shrubland dominated by *Tecticornia* species on moist clay.

VA04: Open tall shrubland to scattered tall shrubs of *Acacia fuscanera* and occasional *Acacia synchronicia* over open mid shrubland of *Eremophila latrobei* subsp. *latrobei*, *Senna* sp. Meekatharra (E. Bailey 1-26) and *Eremophila* spp. over scattered low shrubs of *Ptilotus obovatus* and *Solanum lasiophyllum* over open low chenopod shrubland of *Maireana triptera* and *Sclerolaena* spp. over very open low tussock grassland of *Aristida contorta* and *Enneapogon caeruleus* on skeletal red/brown loamy sand with ironstone outcropping.

VA05: Open tall shrubland to isolated patches of tall shrubs of *Hakea preissii* and *Acacia sclerosperma* subsp. *sclerosperma* over open mid shrubland to scattered mid shrubs of *Dodonaea viscosa* subsp. *angustissima*, *Maireana pyramidata* and *Cratystylis subspinescens* over scattered mid chenopod shrubs of *Maireana triptera* and *Atriplex vesicaria* over scattered low tussock grassland of *Aristida contorta* on red/orange loamy sand.

VA06: Scattered mid shrubs of *Maireana pyramidata* and *Eremophila longifolia* over low chenopod shrubland to low open chenopod shrubland of *Salsola australis*, *Sclerolaena diacantha* and *Dissocarpus paradoxus* over scattered low herbs of *Swainsona paradoxa* on red/orange fine clayey loam.

VA07a: Scattered low trees of *Acacia fuscanera* over open tall shrubland to isolated patches of tall shrubs of *Acacia sclerosperma* subsp. *sclerosperma* and *Hakea preissii* over open mid shrubland of *Eremophila* sp. B, *Senna artemisioides* subsp. *filifolia* and *Senna artemisioides* subsp. *helmsii* over scattered low shrubs of *Ptilotus obovatus* on orange/red clayey, sand.

VA07b: Scattered low trees of *Acacia pteraneura* over scattered tall shrubs of *Hakea preissii* over mid shrubland of *Senna* sp. Meekatharra (E. Bailey 1-26), *Senna* sp. Billabong (J.D. Alonzo 721) and *Eremophila* sp. A on red/orange loamy sand.

VA07c: Open tall shrubland of *Acacia fuscanera* over open mid shrubland of *Eremophila* sp. A over scattered mid chenopod shrubs of *Salsola australis*, *Maireana pyramidata* and *Maireana tomentosa* over scattered mid tussock grasses of *Eragrostis* sp. on red loamy sand.

VA08: Isolated patches of mid shrubs of *Acacia sclerosperma* subsp. *sclerosperma* over scattered low shrubs to open low shrubland of *Frankenia laxiflora*, *Sclerolaena fimbriolata* and *Enchylaena tomentosa* var. *tomentosa* over open low tussock grassland of *Eragrostis eriopoda* and *Enneapogon caeruleus* on orange/red loamy sand with gypsum outcropping.

VA09: Open tall shrubland of *Melaleuca stereophloia* over open mid samphire shrubland of *Tecticornia ?* sp. Dennys Crossing (K.A. Shepherd & J. English KS 552) over scattered low shrubs of *Frankenia laxiflora* on red/orange clayey sand.

VA10: Scattered mid shrubs of *Lawrenzia helmsii* and *Maireana pyramidata* over low chenopod shrubland of *Atriplex vesicaria* and *Maireana amoena* on red/brown clayey sand.

VA11: Open tall shrubland of *Acacia fuscanera* over scattered mid shrubs to open mid shrubland of *Eremophila macmillaniana* and *Eremophila latrobei* subsp. *latrobei* over open low shrubland of *Ptilotus obovatus*, *Solanum lasiophyllum* and *Maireana pyramidata* over very open low tussock grassland of *Aristida contorta* and *Enneapogon caeruleus* on red/orange/white skeletal sandy loam with quartz outcropping.

Clearing Description

Lake Annean Exploration.

Big Bell Gold Operations Pty Ltd proposes to clear up to 12 hectares of native vegetation within a boundary of approximately 1,099 hectares for the purposes of mineral exploration and a pipeline. The project is located approximately 33.5 kilometres south-west of Meekatharra within the Shire of Meekatharra.

Vegetation Condition

Excellent: Vegetation structure intact; disturbance affecting individual species, weeds non-aggressive (Keighery, 1994);

to

Completely Degraded: No longer intact; completely/almost completely without native species (Keighery, 1994).

Comment

The vegetation condition was derived from a report prepared by MWH (2015). Rainfall in March provided suitable conditions for the emergence of ephemeral species and resulted in a number of taxa displaying material to allow suitable identification (MWH, 2015).

Clearing permit CPS 6832/1 was granted on 30 December 2015 authorising the clearing of 2 hectares within a boundary of approximately 1,573.36 hectares. CPS 6832/1 was amended on 22 December 2016 to increase the clearing authorised to 12 hectares. Miscellaneous Licence 51/18 was also removed from the permit area as the purpose of the licence is not compatible with mineral exploration activities.

CPS 6832/3 was granted on 8 June 2017, amending the permit to include 'pipeline' as a purpose for which

clearing is authorised.

On 7 December 2020, the Permit Holder applied to amend CPS 6832/3 to extend the duration of the permit by five years. The Permit Holder also applied to add Prospecting Licence 51/3071 and to remove two dead tenements from the tenure on the permit. This will result in a reduction of the permit boundary by 474 hectares. The area of clearing authorised (12 hectares) will remain unchanged.

3. Assessment of application against Clearing Principles

Comments

The permit holder has applied to extend the permit duration by 5 years and add Prospecting Licence 51/3071 to the permit tenure. The permit holder has also applied to remove two dead tenements (Mining Lease 51/523 and Mining Lease 51/652) from the permit tenure which will result in the permit boundary being reduced from approximately 1,573 hectares to approximately 1,099 hectares. Prospecting Licence 51/3071 is already located within the permit boundary (GIS Database).

The reduction in the size of the permit boundary with no corresponding reduction in the area applied to clear, may result in increased environmental impacts at a local scale. However, the vegetation associations recorded within the permit area are typical of the region and well represented in surrounding areas (MWH, 2015; GIS Database). The proposed amendment is unlikely to result in any significant change to the environmental impacts of the proposed clearing in a regional context.

The amendment application has been assessed against the clearing principles, planning instruments and other matters in accordance with s.51O of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*. Environmental information has been reviewed, and the assessment of the proposed clearing against the clearing principles remains consistent with the assessment contained in previous versions of the decision report.

Methodology MWH (2015)

GIS Database:

- DPaW Tenure
- Hydrography, Lakes
- Hydrography, Linear
- IBRA Australia
- Imagery
- Landsystem Rangelands
- Pre-European Vegetation
- Public Drinking Water Source Areas
- Soils, Statewide
- Threatened and Priority Ecological Communities boundaries
- Threatened and Priority Ecological Communities buffers
- Threatened and Priority Flora
- Threatened Fauna

Planning Instrument, Native Title, previous EPA decision or other matter.

Comments

There is one native title claim over the area under application (DPLH, 2020). This claim has been determined by the Federal Court on behalf of the claimant group. However, the mining tenure has been granted in accordance with the future act regime of the *Native Title Act 1993* and the nature of the act (i.e. the proposed clearing activity) has been provided for in that process, therefore, the granting of a clearing permit is not a future act under the *Native Title Act 1993*.

There is one registered Aboriginal Site of Significance within the application area (DPLH, 2020). It is the proponent's responsibility to comply with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* and ensure that no Aboriginal Sites of Significance are damaged through the clearing process.

It is the proponent's responsibility to liaise with the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, to determine whether a Works Approval, Water Licence, Bed and Banks Permit, or any other licences or approvals are required for the proposed works.

The amendment application was advertised on 21 December 2020 by the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety inviting submissions from the public. No submissions were received in relation to this application.

Methodology DPLH (2020)

4. References

- DPLH (2020) Aboriginal Heritage Inquiry System. Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage.
<https://espatial.dplh.wa.gov.au/AHIS/index.html?viewer=AHIS> (Accessed 24 December 2020).
- Keighery, B.J. (1994) Bushland Plant Survey: A Guide to Plant Community Survey for the Community. Wildflower Society of WA (Inc). Nedlands, Western Australia.
- MWH (2015) Lake Annean Flora and Fauna Assessment. Report prepared for Metals X Limited, by MWH Australia Pty Ltd, September 2015.

5. Glossary

Acronyms:

BC Act	<i>Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016</i> , Western Australia
BoM	Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Government
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Western Australia (now DPLH)
DAFWA	Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia (now DPIRD)
DAWE	Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Australian Government
DBCA	Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Western Australia
DER	Department of Environment Regulation, Western Australia (now DWER)
DMIRS	Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, Western Australia
DMP	Department of Mines and Petroleum, Western Australia (now DMIRS)
DoEE	Department of the Environment and Energy (now DAWE)
DoW	Department of Water, Western Australia (now DWER)
DPaW	Department of Parks and Wildlife, Western Australia (now DBCA)
DPIRD	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Western Australia
DPLH	Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, Western Australia
DRF	Declared Rare Flora (now known as Threatened Flora)
DWER	Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, Western Australia
EP Act	<i>Environmental Protection Act 1986</i> , Western Australia
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority, Western Australia
EPBC Act	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> (Federal Act)
GIS	Geographical Information System
ha	Hectare (10,000 square metres)
IBRA	Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources – commonly known as the World Conservation Union
PEC	Priority Ecological Community, Western Australia
RIWI Act	<i>Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914</i> , Western Australia
TEC	Threatened Ecological Community

Definitions:

{DBCA (2019) Conservation Codes for Western Australian Flora and Fauna. Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Western Australia}:-

T **Threatened species:**

Listed by order of the Minister as Threatened in the category of critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable under section 19(1), or is a rediscovered species to be regarded as threatened species under section 26(2) of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act).

Threatened fauna is that subset of ‘Specially Protected Fauna’ listed under schedules 1 to 3 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018* for Threatened Fauna.

Threatened flora is that subset of ‘Rare Flora’ listed under schedules 1 to 3 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Rare Flora) Notice 2018* for Threatened Flora.

The assessment of the conservation status of these species is based on their national extent and ranked according to their level of threat using IUCN Red List categories and criteria as detailed below.

CR **Critically endangered species**

Threatened species considered to be “*facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future, as determined in accordance with criteria set out in the ministerial guidelines*”.

Listed as critically endangered under section 19(1)(a) of the BC Act in accordance with the criteria set out in section 20 and the ministerial guidelines. Published under schedule 1 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018* for critically endangered fauna or the *Wildlife Conservation (Rare Flora) Notice 2018* for critically endangered flora.

EN **Endangered species**

Threatened species considered to be “*facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future, as determined in accordance with criteria set out in the ministerial guidelines*”.

Listed as endangered under section 19(1)(b) of the BC Act in accordance with the criteria set out in section 21 and the ministerial guidelines. Published under schedule 2 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018* for endangered fauna or the *Wildlife Conservation (Rare Flora) Notice 2018* for endangered flora.

VU

Vulnerable species

Threatened species considered to be “*facing a high risk of extinction in the wild in the medium-term future, as determined in accordance with criteria set out in the ministerial guidelines*”.

Listed as vulnerable under section 19(1)(c) of the BC Act in accordance with the criteria set out in section 22 and the ministerial guidelines. Published under schedule 3 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018* for vulnerable fauna or the *Wildlife Conservation (Rare Flora) Notice 2018* for vulnerable flora.

Extinct Species:

EX

Extinct species

Species where “*there is no reasonable doubt that the last member of the species has died*”, and listing is otherwise in accordance with the ministerial guidelines (section 24 of the BC Act).

Published as presumed extinct under schedule 4 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018* for extinct fauna or the *Wildlife Conservation (Rare Flora) Notice 2018* for extinct flora.

EW

Extinct in the wild species

Species that “*is known only to survive in cultivation, in captivity or as a naturalised population well outside its past range; and it has not been recorded in its known habitat or expected habitat, at appropriate seasons, anywhere in its past range, despite surveys over a time frame appropriate to its life cycle and form*”, and listing is otherwise in accordance with the ministerial guidelines (section 25 of the BC Act).

Currently there are no threatened fauna or threatened flora species listed as extinct in the wild. If listing of a species as extinct in the wild occurs, then a schedule will be added to the applicable notice.

Specially protected species:

Listed by order of the Minister as specially protected under section 13(1) of the BC Act. Meeting one or more of the following categories: species of special conservation interest; migratory species; cetaceans; species subject to international agreement; or species otherwise in need of special protection.

Species that are listed as threatened species (critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable) or extinct species under the BC Act cannot also be listed as Specially Protected species.

MI

Migratory species

Fauna that periodically or occasionally visit Australia or an external Territory or the exclusive economic zone; or the species is subject of an international agreement that relates to the protection of migratory species and that binds the Commonwealth; and listing is otherwise in accordance with the ministerial guidelines (section 15 of the BC Act).

Includes birds that are subject to an agreement between the government of Australia and the governments of Japan (JAMBA), China (CAMBA) and The Republic of Korea (ROKAMBA), and fauna subject to the *Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals* (Bonn Convention), an environmental treaty under the United Nations Environment Program. Migratory species listed under the BC Act are a subset of the migratory animals, that are known to visit Western Australia, protected under the international agreements or treaties, excluding species that are listed as Threatened species.

Published as migratory birds protected under an international agreement under schedule 5 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018*.

CD

Species of special conservation interest (conservation dependent fauna)

Fauna of special conservation need being species dependent on ongoing conservation intervention to prevent it becoming eligible for listing as threatened, and listing is otherwise in accordance with the ministerial guidelines (section 14 of the BC Act).

Published as conservation dependent fauna under schedule 6 of the *Wildlife Conservation (Specially Protected Fauna) Notice 2018*.

OS

Other specially protected species

Fauna otherwise in need of special protection to ensure their conservation, and listing is otherwise in accordance with the ministerial guidelines (section 18 of the BC Act).

P **Priority species:**

Possibly threatened species that do not meet survey criteria, or are otherwise data deficient, are added to the Priority Fauna or Priority Flora Lists under Priorities 1, 2 or 3. These three categories are ranked in order of priority for survey and evaluation of conservation status so that consideration can be given to their declaration as threatened fauna or flora.

Species that are adequately known, are rare but not threatened, or meet criteria for near threatened, or that have been recently removed from the threatened species or other specially protected fauna lists for other than taxonomic reasons, are placed in Priority 4. These species require regular monitoring.

Assessment of Priority codes is based on the Western Australian distribution of the species, unless the distribution in WA is part of a contiguous population extending into adjacent States, as defined by the known spread of locations.

P1 **Priority One - Poorly-known species**

Species that are known from one or a few locations (generally five or less) which are potentially at risk. All occurrences are either: very small; or on lands not managed for conservation, e.g. agricultural or pastoral lands, urban areas, road and rail reserves, gravel reserves and active mineral leases; or otherwise under threat of habitat destruction or degradation. Species may be included if they are comparatively well known from one or more locations but do not meet adequacy of survey requirements and appear to be under immediate threat from known threatening processes. Such species are in urgent need of further survey.

P2 **Priority Two - Poorly-known species**

Species that are known from one or a few locations (generally five or less), some of which are on lands managed primarily for nature conservation, e.g. national parks, conservation parks, nature reserves and other lands with secure tenure being managed for conservation. Species may be included if they are comparatively well known from one or more locations but do not meet adequacy of survey requirements and appear to be under threat from known threatening processes. Such species are in urgent need of further survey.

P3 **Priority Three - Poorly-known species**

Species that are known from several locations, and the species does not appear to be under imminent threat, or from few but widespread locations with either large population size or significant remaining areas of apparently suitable habitat, much of it not under imminent threat. Species may be included if they are comparatively well known from several locations but do not meet adequacy of survey requirements and known threatening processes exist that could affect them. Such species are in need of further survey.

P4 **Priority Four - Rare, Near Threatened and other species in need of monitoring**

(a) Rare. Species that are considered to have been adequately surveyed, or for which sufficient knowledge is available, and that are considered not currently threatened or in need of special protection but could be if present circumstances change. These species are usually represented on conservation lands.

(b) Near Threatened. Species that are considered to have been adequately surveyed and that are close to qualifying for vulnerable but are not listed as Conservation Dependent.

(c) Species that have been removed from the list of threatened species during the past five years for reasons other than taxonomy.

Principles for clearing native vegetation:

- (a) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises a high level of biological diversity.
- (b) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of, a significant habitat for fauna indigenous to Western Australia.
- (c) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it includes, or is necessary for the continued existence of, rare flora.
- (d) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of a threatened ecological community.
- (e) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is significant as a remnant of native vegetation in an area that has been extensively cleared.
- (f) Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is growing in, or in association with, an environment associated with a watercourse or wetland.
- (g) Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to cause appreciable land degradation.

- (h)** Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to have an impact on the environmental values of any adjacent or nearby conservation area.
- (i)** Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to cause deterioration in the quality of surface or underground water.
- (j)** Native vegetation should not be cleared if clearing the vegetation is likely to cause, or exacerbate, the incidence or intensity of flooding.