



The Hon Anthony Roberts MP

Minister for Resources and Energy
Special Minister of State

MEDIA RELEASE

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A NEW ERA FOR LIGHTNING RIDGE

Minister for Resources and Energy Anthony Roberts said the Liberals & Nationals Government's new laws to improve relations between landholders and opal miners in the world's Black Opal capital, Lightning Ridge, have been passed by the NSW Parliament.

Mr Roberts said the *Mining Amendment (Small-Scale Title Compensation) Bill 2014* will reduce tensions between landholders and opal prospectors.

"For more than a century opal mining and primary production have provided the economic backbone for Lightning Ridge," Mr Roberts said.

"Lightning Ridge is where 95 per cent of Australia's black opals (the world's most valuable opals) are found and the Black Opal is the State's official gemstone.

"The town in Walgett Shire, 50 kilometres from the Queensland boarder, is a thriving tourist destination attracting 80,000 visitors a year, with many chancing their hand at prospecting.

"There are more than 3,100 small scale titles on just 26 properties in Lightning Ridge.

"The new laws will address the countless disputes between landholders and opal prospectors about compensation arrangements.

"In 2013 the Liberals & Nationals Government released its final response to the report and recommendations by former Federal Court judge, Mr Murray Wilcox, which streamline, clarify and formalise interactions between landholders and opal miners.

"The Liberals & Nationals Government has cleaned up another legacy of the former Labor Government, which reviewed and examined these issues, yet failed to deliver."

To improve the relationship between opal miners and landholders the *Mining Amendment (Small-Scale Titles Compensation) Bill 2014*:

- Establishes a standard opal prospecting compensation scheme for landholders, set at \$100 per year for mineral claims and \$100 plus 10 cents per hectare for opal prospecting licences (indexed to keep up with inflation);
- Introduces a new application process to ensure that standard compensation is paid or a private compensation agreement is in place with a landholder before a small scale title is granted or renewed;
- Enables the Minister to impose levies on opal miners for purposes including rehabilitation and the provision and maintenance of service roads – this can be completed collectively for a group of miners; and
- Introduces a mandatory conciliation and arbitration process through the Land and Environment Court to resolve disputes before proceeding to a hearing.

Minister for Western NSW and Member for Barwon Kevin Humphries said the passage of the Bill now ensures the future viability of Lightning Ridge's iconic opal industry.

"Opal mining and agriculture are the primary industries supporting Lightning Ridge," Mr Humphries said.

"The successful passage of this Bill reflects the extensive consultation we have undertaken to reach a fair and equitable resolution that ensures the town's mining, agriculture and tourism industries continue to prosper."