



Anthony Roberts
Minister for Industry, Resources and Energy

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 28 July 2016

VOLUNTARY SURRENDER SCHEME A SUCCESS FOR LIGHTNING RIDGE

Two recent compliance inspection operations at Lightning Ridge have shown major improvements in both the regulation of the opal industry and the needs of farmers, the NSW Minister for Industry, Resources and Energy, Anthony Roberts, announced today.

The NSW Resources Regulator recently completed its third annual compliance operation in Lightning Ridge, delivering on the NSW Government's promise of greater regulatory oversight in the region.

"The NSW Resources Regulator inspected 282 opal mine claims during a two-day operation and I am pleased to report that inspectors have informed me there was a high level of willingness among opal claim holders to comply with mining, safety and rehabilitation conditions," Mr Roberts said.

"Generally, Lightning Ridge's claim holders are very keen to make sure they are doing the right thing, with only minor compliance issues identified across the vast majority of mineral claims. The Resources Regulator is continuing to work with non-compliant claim holders, and where necessary, will take enforcement action to ensure compliance."

Mr Roberts said the increased level of compliance work at Lightning Ridge is the result of an extended program to balance the interests of farmers and opal miners in this important regional centre.

"We recently concluded the Lightning Ridge Voluntary Surrender Scheme, during which the NSW Government made offers to landholders to buy back land which is significantly impacted by opal mining activities," Mr Roberts said.

This one-off offer resulted in acceptances of offers for property lots that host more than 800 mineral claims, or around 25 per cent of all mineral claims in Lightning Ridge, meaning nearly half of all mineral claims will be on land managed by the Lightning Ridge and Surrounding Opal Fields Management Reserve Trust.

An independent private valuer provided valuations for the properties nominated for surrender in April and the Government issued offers during May.

"Leaseholders who did not participate in the Voluntary Surrender Scheme will continue to operate within the existing land use regime and coexist with opal miners.

“Following the recent compliance operation the NSW Resources Regulator will conduct follow up inspections to ensure the safety and environmental issues identified at a small number of sites are rectified.

“In order to ensure that our community benefits from mining operations, it is also important that the community contacts the NSW Resources Regulator with any concerns.”

Any urgent safety matters can be reported to the NSW Resources Regulator on 1300 814 609. All other safety and environment matters can be reported via email at resources.regulator@industry.nsw.gov.au.

For enquiries concerning the Lightning Ridge operation or local claims, please contact the Resource Regulator’s Lightning Ridge office on 02 6829 9203.