

MINERS CALL FOR TAX RELIEF

CRITICAL SUPPORT



Australia may be the world's best quarry but significant government intervention may be needed to turn crucial energy transition minerals into long-term wealth.

Nickel and lithium producers warn the recent slump in prices they can get on world markets is crushing net zero dreams, terminating more than 1000 jobs and mothballing projects.

The competitive advantage Australia has enjoyed in iron ore and coal is not the same for critical minerals, according to Deloitte Access Economics.

"More urgent progress is needed to ensure Australia has the right labour, infrastructure, regulations and key trade relationships to underpin the mining industry's next phase of growth," the forecaster said in its latest business outlook.

Operating costs are rising and nickel prices have rapidly halved, while local producers struggle to compete with Indonesia where labour costs and environmental standards are lower.

Meanwhile, the price of lithium has crashed more than 80 per cent since the peaks of 2022, despite euphoria about the rise of electric cars and consumer demand for a climate-friendly future.

China continues to have a

stranglehold on the supply of battery-ready materials and the cash squeeze is putting Australia's desired expansion into processing battery chemicals on the backburner.

After crisis talks with State and Federal Government ministers, BHP Nickel West boss Jessica Farrell said the "incredibly tough time" for the nickel industry was a "wake-up call" for Australia.

Relief from paying State royalties, Federal tax incentives for investment, emergency cash injections and production tax credits are on the table.

Resources Minister Madeleine King committed to "accelerate" Treasury's work on production tax credits and how they might be applied in the nickel industry and more widely across the critical minerals sector.

"Nickel and lithium will be essential to the global ambitions to reach net zero emissions," Ms King said. "When the playing field is fair, Australian resources stand a fair chance."

Producers also want governments to bankroll adequate road, rail and energy infrastructure to get raw materials to processing and ports.

Pilbara Minerals CEO Dale

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BHP Nickel West's Jessica Farrell.
Picture: Iain Gillespie

Guilty pleas after bail refusal

ANNEKE DE BOER

A 25-year-old who threw rocks at a family member and stole her phone pleaded guilty to four charges in court on Thursday after a second failed attempt to get bail.

Juwaun Mitchel Morrison appeared in Kalgoorlie Magistrates Court via

video link from Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison to face two aggravated assault charges, a stealing charge and a breach of bail charge.

The court was told the details of Morrison's assaults with the first charge for an incident on October 11 when an argument broke out between

Morrison and his victim after the pair were drinking at a home in Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

The altercation turned physical with Morrison hurling rocks at the victim.

Another disagreement broke out between the two after a family meal about

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EV travel gets a power boost

ANNEKE DE BOER

The trip from Kalgoorlie-Boulder to Perth is up to three hours shorter for electric vehicle drivers, with the State's charging network project reaching its halfway milestone.

One of Kalgoorlie-Boulder's early EV adopters is local GP Kylie Sterry who

told the Kalgoorlie Miner she couldn't wait to take the trip.

"I'm super excited that there's now fast charging from Kalgoorlie to Perth," Dr Sterry said.

"It means that instead of stopping for 2½-3 hours in Merredin, I can now stop for 15 minutes to get to Perth in my Tesla."

Of the planned 49 charging locations across WA, 25 sites are now live.

The new infrastructure will enable EV owners to recharge in 15-30 minutes, with stations averaging about 200km apart along major travel routes.

Dr Sterry, who has

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Give & take in switching off

Employers would only face fines for contacting workers out of hours in egregious circumstances, the employment minister suggests, as consultation continues on the right to disconnect.

Tony Burke is continuing discussions with business groups to ensure a balance is struck as momentum grows for laws allowing workers to switch off and ignore work calls and emails out of hours.

One concept being discussed is that instead of fining employers making contact, employees could go to the Fair Work Commission

for a stop order if things get out of hand and they are expected to do unpaid work. Fines would be applied if the stop order was breached, Mr Burke said.

"That's a sort of concept that's been being talked about, it's a pretty light touch, but it also establishes a principle that just says ... you're meant to be paid when you're working," he told Sky News on Sunday.

But a balance was needed because there were times when it would be reasonable for a boss to contact a worker, he said.

"It's completely reasonable for

any employer if they've got a shift that hasn't been filled, to do a ring-around to see if someone can do a shift," he said. "We've got to make sure we don't create a problem."

While some employees were paid allowances to cover incidental overtime, the laws would aim to tackle unreasonable unpaid hours, the minister said.

"When someone is only paid, be it nine to five or nine to three or ... whatever their hours might be, and that's all they're being paid, is it reasonable for them also to be expected to be regularly working outside of those hours without

pay?" he said. "If it's not reasonable, then what on earth can they easily do about it to be able to get it to stop?"

Greens leader Adam Bandt said the party was having good discussions with the Government about potential models.

"It's critical that law keeps up with technology, and it just hasn't at the moment," he said.

"Too many people are under (an) enormous amount of stress and there's a lot of unreasonable contact that happens for people that makes it hard to have good time with your family or to just

recharge for work the next day."

The Australian Industry Group is calling for more scrutiny, saying some work agreements already contain provisions for contacting employees after hours, reflecting the needs of particular sectors.

"This is a solution to a problem that very rarely exists, and there hasn't been a lot of evidence that this does exist on any sort of widespread or consistent scale," chief executive Innes Willox told ABC TV. "Workplaces are a lot about give and take, and employers understand that they have to work with their employees as well."



Adam Gangemi is MD of Super Smart Energy. Picture: Andrew Ritchie

Upgrades to affect Telstra's coverage

NEIL WATKINSON

A week-long upgrade to a mobile base station in the Kalgoorlie central business district beginning this week will cause a series of temporary outages or reductions in coverage.

The objective of the upgrade is to bring better 4G and 5G services to the city.

Telstra said work was expected to begin on Thursday and, barring unforeseen circumstances, would be completed the following Wednesday.

The company said landline services, NBN internet and mobile coverage from surrounding Telstra sites or other providers would not be affected.

It said any triple-0 call from a Telstra mobile phone when the site was off-air would automatically be diverted to any working network in the area for connection to emergency services.

Telstra regional general manager Boyd Brown said the site would be switched off only when needed and would be brought back on as quickly as possible.

"Where possible, we will just be switching off the parts of the tower we are working on, leaving the rest operational," he said.

"While coverage and capacity will decline during this time, we want to keep the amount of time the site is off-air to an absolute minimum.

"There is never a good time to undertake this sort of work but once it is completed it will mean better mobile services for local residents."

The company encouraged residents to activate wi-fi calling on their phones if they had access to wi-fi at work or at home, so they could continue to make and receive mobile calls.

EV travel times slashed as network hits milestone

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owned her red Tesla Model 3 Long Range car since 2021 said she hoped the stations would make more people consider switching to electric.

"I think that's going to encourage the explosion of EVs," she said.

"Kalgoorlie is such a great place to own an EV ... we've got lots of sunshine to charge on solar and most of our driving is just around town with our second cars — the EVs are perfect."

Once completed, the network

will connect the State from Kununurra in the north to Esperance in the south, with outposts in Kalgoorlie-Boulder and Eucla to the east.

Renewables consultancy Super Smart Energy managing director Adam Gangemi said while the new stations allowed more people to travel with EVs, they still faced challenges.

"The milestone is definitely an enabler, now there's greater coverage around Western Australia," he said.

"However, it's still not like you can just go to the petrol station

and fuel up in five minutes, there's still a longer time required.

"If you have to do two-plus charges a day it's going to be a bit challenging from a time perspective."

Mr Gangemi said charging times were likely to improve as technology developed.

"The other problem is once everyone starts to adopt EVs, and we've only got one or two chargers per site — what happens if you arrive and there's someone on the charger?" he said.

"Those issues will come as elec-

tric vehicle adoption gathers momentum."

Energy Minister Reece Whitby said the WA EV Network was providing the backbone of EV charging infrastructure needed to encourage more uptake.

"These charging stations are now in 25 locations, making it easier for EV drivers to explore our wonderful State while reducing their travel time and range anxiety," he said.

"The WA EV Network is playing an important role in supporting sustainable transportation development."

Man facing assault charges refused bail for nephew's funeral

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two months later on December 16. The violent outburst saw Morrison punch the victim in the ribs, with the force of the impact causing her to fall to the ground. He then stole a black Samsung phone from the woman and fled the scene.

Morrison's lawyer Murray Stubbs applied for bail on his behalf, explaining to the court that although Morrison had been denied bail in the past, he was due to be a pallbearer at his nephew's funeral the following week.

Police prosecutor Sen. Con. Matthew Fullgrabe opposed the bail

application, citing the ongoing risk to the victim and a previous breach of bail.

"He doesn't seem to have regard for the victim's safety," Mr Fullgrabe told the court.

Mr Stubbs said Morrison intended to end the relationship with the victim and was willing to report to police

while he lived with his grandmother as a bail condition.

Magistrate Clare Cullen appeared in court via video link from Perth and said since this was the second bail application there needed to be a significant change of circumstances for bail to be reconsidered.

"I understand you want to attend

your nephew's funeral," Ms Cullen said. "I do not find that constitutes a change of circumstance ... I will refuse bail."

With bail denied, Morrison entered his pleas to the court — pleading guilty to all four charges.

He is due to appear in court to be sentenced on February 29.