

Coast mining 'open for business'

Laura Mills

West Coast mines are taking on staff, and the country is 'open for business', industry leaders said today at the Minerals West Coast annual forum, in Westport.

The mood was upbeat, despite the challenges the industry faces.

The gathering of 140 delegates from around New Zealand and Western Australia came as news broke the Government's 'no new mines' policy will not happen before the general election.

A panel debate led by Minerals West Coast host and chairman Richard Tacon, who is also chief executive of Stockton coalmine owner Bathurst Resources,

asked 'why work or invest in mining on the West Coast or elsewhere in New Zealand in 2023?'

Mr Tacon said they could "whinge" about access, consents and costs, but there were currently active mines all over New Zealand.

Simon Delander from Federation Mining, which is drilling the Snowy River underground mine at Waiuta, said it had 52 staff and had just hired 10 more. Some had farming backgrounds and were being retrained as miners. Federation was now chasing fitters and electricians as it grew towards a workforce of 150 when it hit gold production.

The Government regime for consenting was "quite fair and pragmatic".

Although it was not easy, the process was clear. He liked that they had to have a detailed closure plan from early in their planning, Mr Delander said.

The community was supportive, and the Government was an investor through the provincial growth fund.

"Why wouldn't you want to mine on the West Coast?"

Elect Mining's Jayde van Dissel, which operates three gold sites around Hokitika, said they were creating employment.

Four years ago, they had to stay four to six months ahead with permits and consents, but now it was at least two years from looking at ground in a paddock, before Crown Minerals would even look at issuing the permit.

A lot of what they mined had been mined before, but they often found richer wash underneath.

"At times like now when the price is high, you've got it all there."

Within six to 12 months after mining, with rehabilitation, "you could not tell the area had been mined".

Westland Minerals Sands director Ray Mudgway said they were creating an inter-generational industry, starting with their new mine under way at Cape Foulwind.

Some of the best garnets on the planet were found on the West Coast, and its ilmenite was in huge demand.

New Zealand deposits could fill a worldwide gap, he said.