

Miners aim for greener image

Ellen Curnow

West Coast mining industry leaders are keen to shake off a legacy of poor environmental rehabilitation and create a cleaner, greener image.

About 150 coal, gold and mineral sand miners, as well as other industry professionals, gathered for the West Coast Minerals Forum in Westport yesterday.

And the environment was a hot topic. Several miners said the industry did a poor job at telling people what it did well. Being green was about more than just image or meeting consent requirements, some said.

Minerals West Coast (MWC) chair and Bathurst Mining chief executive Richard Tacon led a panel on why people should work and invest in West Coast mining in 2023.

Mr Tacon said the industry faced a lot of "negative thoughts around mining".

"We could actually have a whole conference and whinge about the Resource Management Act process, whinge about access, whinge about the legislation and whatever else."

But the day was better spent looking at positive developments in the industry, Mr Tacon said.

Stephanie Hayton, senior environmental advisor at Oceana-Gold talked about the multi-million-dollar rehabilitation project at the Globe Progress mine near Reefton. The project is the biggest beech podocarp reforestation in New Zealand.

"It's an expectation that, when you mine, you put everything back as you best you can," Ms Hayton said.

Modern miners had a responsibility to protect biodiversity, she said.

"Not leaving a negative legacy for someone else or for future generations to have to deal with."

Ms Hayton said the industry was good

at research and innovation about mine closure. But it wasn't good at showing the community what "real, actual mod-



Local miners Ray Mudgway (Westland Mineral Sands) and Richard Tacon (Bathurst Resources) discussed developments at the Westport port this morning. About 150 miners gathered yesterday for the West Coast Minerals Forum. Photo: Ellen Curnow

ern mining looks like".

One audience member asked if the Oceana Gold project set an unrealistic precedent for smaller miners. He asked if the money on rehabilitation was well spent.

MWC manager Patrick Phelps said it didn't. The Department of Conservation (DOC) had stringent requirements on miners on public land.

"The company would have made those decisions very early on and from what I've seen it's a very good example of restoration."

The high standard of rehabilitation at Globe was likely to build trust from DOC and to make it easier for other companies to get mining consents, Mr Phelps said.

"It's been 30 or 40 years since some of the big legacy issues in terms of like Tui

in Te Aroha and that sort of stuff. And the industry is still battling that legacy even though we're not operating under the same legislation anymore. It's still hard to get that out of critics' heads. I think everyone's as good as your last job basically."

Mr Tacon said rehabilitation needed to be budgeted for and was part of the economic viability of the mine.

"If you want to go and mine a million ounces of coal in a forest park area... you're going to have to rehabilitate it back to that condition or better to be able to get it off the ground. It's a \$3.5 billion revenue cheque and you're going to have to allocate \$50 million at the end of it. Otherwise piss off."

Mr Tacon said environmental rehabilitation was a lot like health and safety.

"It's not a burden, it's just part of what you do. And if you're not planning on doing that and you're going to hurt people then you're going to be out of the industry. You will not be able to continue."

Westport miner Ray Mudgway said he wanted to build a "multi-generational" industry on the West Coast and sustain-

ability was part of that.

Mr Mudgway is managing director of Westland Mineral Sands (WMS), which started mining heavy mineral concentrate on Okari Road, about 15km from Westport in December last year.

WMS would rehabilitate land as it went and was looking at other ways to reduce its carbon footprint, Mr Mudgway said.

Robert Brand, managing director of Perth-based company TiGa Minerals said modern miners had to overcome a legacy of poor environmental practice. TiGa recently lodged a consent application to mine heavy mineral sands on the Barrytown flats. Mr Brand did not mention last year's unsuccessful bid for consent.

Federation Mining vice president Simon Delander said it wasn't easy to get resource consents in New Zealand. But the process was "fair and pragmatic". The company was required to produce a detailed closure plan for its Snowy River mine near Reefton before it even began mining, he said.