

## Wimmera untapped copper belt could benefit Stawell ☆

By EMMA D'AGOSTINO Nov. 6, 2013, 9:36 a.m.



AN untapped copper belt running through the Wimmera might benefit Stawell's labour force.

But Northern Grampians Shire Council Mayor Wayne Rice does not believe it will be the town's saviour.

State and federal government researchers unearthed a belt of volcanic rock known as the Miga Arc while surveying the geology of western Victoria.

The belt stretches from the Victorian coastline at Warrnambool north into the Mallee.

Stawell-based mineral exploration company Navarre Minerals' managing director Geoff McDermott believes the Miga Arc could spark a mining boom in the Wimmera.

"There is potential for the discovery of giant deposits," he told the *Mail-Times* last month.

"Copper is known as a red metal – this could be the red rush. It would be a multi-billion-dollar boost to the region."

But Cr Rice said it would be years before a mine could be established if a suitable site was found within the municipality.

He said the Stawell Gold Mines' mill was also unsuitable for copper processing.

Northern Grampians Shire Council is looking for ways to support economic growth and community development in Stawell and the wider region if the gold mine closes.

Mining company Stawell Gold Mines had forecast gold supplies in its mine would dry up this year, but last month announced plans to continue its underground gold mining activity into 2014.

"Apart from keeping the labor force in the region, the copper belt is otherwise unlikely to be of any benefit at this point in time," Cr Rice said.

But Cr Rice said the copper belt's discovery could mean an increase in mineral exploration in the Wimmera.

Because Navarre Minerals is a Stawell-based company, Cr Rice said a boost to its business would benefit the town.

Cr Rice anticipated some of the Stawell Gold Mines' employees might stay if any work resulting from the copper belt's discovery utilised their skills.

Experts might also be enticed into the region by the promise of copper discoveries.

"But in short, it's not likely to be the saviour of Stawell," Cr Rice said.

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