

Millions for metal search

A multi-million dollar State Government commitment to explore mining potential across the state is set to provide the catalyst for a renewed hunt for gold and other base metals across the Wimmera and Western District.

The government will provide a total of almost \$2-million to five resource companies for nine exploration projects across the region near Ararat, Stawell, Horsham and Nhill.

Stavely Minerals, Navarre Minerals, GBM Resources, Murray Basin Resources and Austpac Resources will use the money on the projects within a Stavely geological province, which stretches from Mildura in the north to Mortlake in the south.

A geological research program involving Geological Survey of Victoria and Geoscience Australia has identified the potential for gold, copper and other base-metal mineralisation in the area.

The government money, provided on an industry-matched basis to mineral-exploration companies, comes from the first round of a \$15-million TARGET program.

TARGET grants cover up to half the cost of exploration activities, including geophysical surveys, drilling and sampling analysis.

The companies provide the balance required for the projects.

The government is banking on the projects enhancing understanding of the region's geology and its potential for new discoveries, which would encourage investment and new projects in regional Victoria.

Grant recipients and projects from round one are Stavely Minerals, \$1-million for five projects south-west of Ararat and near Mortlake; Navarre Minerals, \$626,000 for a project near Stawell; GBM Resources, \$185,000 for a project south-west of Ararat; Murray Basin Resources, \$74,000 for a project north-east of Horsham; Austpac Resources, \$53,000 for a project near Nhill and Dimboola.

Potential

Resources Minister Wade Noonan said the program would help determine the potential to capitalise on natural resources.

"Now is the time to boost exploration for future mineral discoveries so we can encourage mining and exploration companies to come and invest in Victoria," he said.

"This program could generate more than 50 new jobs and a \$20-million investment in the region, with any discovery and subsequent mining creating even more jobs and investment."

The Navarre Minerals grant is for exploration of Irvine and Benno gold prospects, part of a Stawell Corridor Gold Project. The prospects, discovered last year, are 15 kilometres south of Stawell Magdala Gold Mine and at the northern end of the historic Ararat goldfield.

Navarre Minerals managing director Geoff McDermott said the company was delighted its application for co-funding had been successful.

"Our proposed exploration program has been deemed of technical and economic merit, independently validating our positive view that Irvine and Benno represent an exciting exploration proposition," he said.

Stavely Minerals has money for work at its Thursday Gossan, Toora West, Mt Stavely, Fairview, Ararat and Carroll's VMS prospects.

Managing director Chris Cairns said his company was also delighted with the news.

"We have been saving some of our very best copper-gold exploration opportunities in western Victoria in anticipation of receiving government co-funding. The receipt of these offers represents a major step forward for the company," he said.

"Successful exploration can have a huge impact on regional economies and provide significant employment and growth."