

U-mine decision time extended

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COMPANIES hoping to develop a multibillion-dollar uranium mine in the Flinders Ranges have welcomed a surprise time extension to put their case.

But operators of the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, where the lucrative ore deposit lies, have complained they were not told about the changed timeframe.

The clash of environment and economy has seen both sides calling on supporters to rally and make submissions to the "Seeking a Balance" proposals put out by the Department of Mineral Resources that would allow limited mining in some areas of Arkaroola.

Both sides have condemned the paper – Arkaroola's operators say it is "flawed" because it downplays environmental

factors while miners described it as "appalling" for not pushing the case hard enough for mining. In December public feedback on the paper was extended by six weeks to January 29, despite officials previously telling stakeholders such an extension was impossible.

Under the draft policy, some areas of the northern Flinders Ranges would be given more protection from mining but others would be subject to various degrees of mining.

Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary spokeswoman Marg Sprigg said she does not want any mining in the sanctuary, which is a premier tourism destination and multi-award winning eco-tourism operation.

"We only heard about the extension of time for submissions from contacts in the mining industry – it appears aimed at helping miners get their submissions in," she said.

"We initially complained the

timeframe was too short but were told an extension was impossible.

"We expect the mining industry will be thrilled with this extension as they rally supporters to put the case for a huge mine, but Arkaroola is too important to be given over to mining.

"I am a geologist and am not against mining, but I don't think giving over a pristine wilderness area with huge tourism value to mining is the way to go when there are plenty of other places in SA to mine."

Marathon Resources has found what is so far Australia's fifth biggest deposit of uranium on Arkaroola but the deposit could be far larger as it has not been fully mapped.

Marathon chairman Peter Williams said the company had spent \$15 million assessing the deposit and wants to spend much more developing what could be a "multibillion dollar"

mine. "This will generate enormous wealth and jobs for South Australia and the nation," he said.

"We are happy to support environmental matters but equally we believe there are economic matters of importance to the nation.

"I believe we could work harmoniously with the eco-tourism industry so everyone is a winner. This is the fifth biggest reserve of uranium in Australia but it could be far bigger." Mr Williams described the government's paper as "appalling" with little logic and major flaws.

Marathon has not yet lodged its submission about the paper and welcomed the extension to give it more time.

Marathon has advised shareholders that due to "frustration" with delays in being able to develop the mine it has moved its workforce out of the Arkaroola Village.