

UR 1920-1922/86-87

23rd June, 1922.

The Honourable
The Minister for Mines,
H O B A R T.

Dear Sir/

Proposed Erection of Asbestos Mill
at Beaconsfield

As instructed by your predecessor I have had this matter further investigated, and as the result beg to submit to you attached report from Mr. W.D. Reid, Government Assayer, on the design and cost of the mill. This will supply the information which was promised by Sir Elliott Lewis at the end of last Session to be obtained before the re-opening of Parliament.

I would also beg to draw your attention to my letter of 1st November, 1921 on this matter. Since writing that letter the matter, as stated above, has been more fully gone into, and as will be seen from Mr. Reid's report, a mill suitable for the purpose would cost £5,900.

In the proposals which gave rise to the lower estimates some equipment was provided for which would give very unsatisfactory results. If a mill is to be constructed it would, in my opinion, be essential for it to be reasonably efficient for the purpose as anything of a lower standard than this would give rise to constant trouble through stoppages and general inefficiency.

In addition to the sum of £5,900 there will have to be provided, if the men work on the basis of a miner's right claim, an amount of £150 to provide for tools and equipment.

Without going over the subject matter of my previous letter, I would desire to draw your attention to the contingencies under sections(4), (5) and (6) of that letter.

I recently visited Beaconsfield, accompanied by Mr. W.D. Reid, and met the miners interested in the matter, to the number of about thirty. One of the questions I put to them was in regard to what they would do if the Inspector of Mines told them to remove certain ground which was unsafe. The answer was: "We would tell him to do it himself." It is clear therefore that working under that scheme the Government would sooner or later be called on to provide for such work being done in order to keep up the output. Of course, it is quite possible that this difficulty can be overcome and I do not put it forward as insuperable.

After very careful consideration of all phases of the problem, and taking cognizance only of those outcrops of asbestos which have been examined by officers of the Geological Survey, we have come to the conclusion that an output of 15 tons of selected ore per day could not be maintained for very many months by 30 men working as co-operative parties. Mr. W.H. Smith and the miners interested

The Honourable the Minister for Mines, Hobart.

23.6.22

in the question apparently are of the same opinion as they seem to place very great stress on the number of rich outcrops which they have located and are at present keeping secret. When asked whether they would show us these places Mr. W.H. Smith declined to do so. In view of the fact that the continuous supply of ore to the mill would depend on the existence of these occurrences. I cannot make any definite recommendation in the matter unless and until we have the opportunity of examining such rich outcrops as they claim to have located. Even after such outcrops are shown to us we may consider it necessary that further prospecting should be done before we would feel justified in recommending the expenditure on the mill. This could be effected, however, in a manner which would help unemployment in the district, by adopting the practice of paying the miners so much per foot for shaft sinking under our supervision, such moneys to be repaid by the miners if the proposed scheme is subsequently gone on with. Such work of prospecting could be preliminary either to the erection of the mill and the working of the claims by miners' rights, or to the greater scheme of development and exploratory work mentioned in paragraph (7) of my letter of the 1st November, 1921.

Further consideration of the matter, however, is impossible until we have the opportunity of getting further information in regard to the rich outcrops stated to have been located by those interested in the scheme.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

(Sgd.) Loftus Hills

DIRECTOR