

EDITORIAL

McGowan must act to protect big projects and WA jobs

Pity the big company decision makers charged with giving the green light to major resource projects in this State. The shock announcement last week by the Environmental Protection Authority on carbon offsets has left the sector wrestling with unwanted and, in practical and financial terms, unworkable guidelines.

The EPA recommended that new projects in WA emitting more than 100,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases a year be forced to offset those emissions by planting trees or buying carbon credits.

Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA chief executive Paul Everingham said the guidelines could damage the WA economy just as the future was looking brighter.

Woodside chief executive Peter Coleman said the EPA's proposal would put investment and jobs at risk.

"Not only will this proposal put at risk new jobs, investment and domestic gas supplies, it positions Western Australia at a competitive disadvantage in the global LNG marketplace," he said.

The McGowan Government "did not ask for this mess, but it is saddled with responsibility for sorting it out", he said.

The Government's response has been underwhelming in the extreme.

Initially, Premier Mark McGowan did not say he would unilaterally ignore the recommendation but said his Government's top priority was creating jobs.

"The EPA makes recommendations,

governments make decisions," he said.

But the nature of that decision was unclear.

Then early this week Environment Minister Stephen Dawson said his "major concern is there was very little or no consultation" before the EPA's announcement.

And yesterday the Government rejected calls from Woodside to consider legislation to clear up the mess, despite warnings that the EPA guidelines would drown projects in red tape and open the door to endless, expensive court disputes.

Minister for Mines and Petroleum Bill Johnston said there was no need to legislate.

He said that unlike some Eastern States, environmental decisions in WA were made by the State Government, not a court.

That remains to be seen.

So far it has seemed like the Government has had its head in the sand.

Today, Mr McGowan will meet industry leaders about the crisis.

They will want a clear and deliverable path to safeguard their massive investments and the jobs that will come with the green light for big projects.

Nothing less than complete certainty will do.