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OUR STAFF COMES FIRST

West Australian, Perth

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STATE POLITICAL EDITOR

Mining and resources giants have assured the Premier that the wellbeing and safety of their vast workforce of staff and contractors will be a priority in the event of a widespread COVID-19 outbreak.

More than a dozen of the industry's most senior executives, including Chevron Australia managing director Al Williams and BHP acting president of operations Edgar Basto, yesterday discussed their pandemic planning.

The meeting was held just days after energy stocks suffered double-digit falls on share markets across the globe after Saudi Arabia and Russia sparked an oil price war.

Mr Williams said the companies shared their mutual concerns about dealing with the lethal disease, which has seen entire cities and countries placed into lockdown.

"We really appreciate (the Premier's) leadership and making sure that we can be very responsive in managing any particular case that may occur," he said outside Dumas House after the one-hour meeting.

"What it means for the mining industry is that we

want to make sure we take the right steps in the interests of all of our employees and the

community and be in support of the Government in that same endeavour."

The roundtable took place as Mark McGowan confirmed The West's report that he was considering payroll tax relief for small and medium-sized businesses suffering from the economic impact of the illness.

He said the State Government was also looking at what it could do to "alleviate cost of living pressures", with a freeze on electricity prices expected in May's Budget.

Mr McGowan said the primary focus of the meeting was on the safety and welfare of the workforce and broader community.

He said the industry leaders agreed they would follow the Government's guidelines "in a calm and responsible manner".

"The meeting was very constructive. The ongoing dialogue we have with the industry is really important to ensure we work together through these unique and uncertain times," Mr McGowan said.

"I urged them to keep their hardworking staff employed and keep supporting local small businesses."

Chamber of Minerals and Energy chief executive Paul Everingham said

preparedness, continuity of business and infection control plans were shared by the powerful group.

"In terms of impact (of COVID-19) at the moment, not a single export cargo or commodity has been affected as yet," he said.

"We are expecting resources to play a really big role in the economic rebound after this disease has passed through, potentially over the next three or four months with the Australian winter.

"At the moment, preparedness is high — impact is very, very low."

Mr Everingham said both from an employee and contractor perspective, the companies had "their wellbeing and their safety at heart and as a priority".

"We are going to keep employing our employees and our contractors through this," he said.

"We don't think there will be discontinuity of our operations, but regardless we are keen to keep on the contractors and employees

that, rightly, have been a big part of our members' successes."

After he was accused of being "absolutely missing in action" by Opposition



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leader Liza Harvey on Tuesday, Mr McGowan called for “bi-partisan-ship”. “I’m sure we can get through this. I want us to work together, not panic, remain calm, listen to the advice and do the right thing by each other. If we do that, we will get through this as best we can,” he said.

