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Phosphate Resources is disappointed Peter Garrett, the Minister for the Environment has rejected our application for additional mining leases on Christmas Island.

What is particularly troubling is the decision being made under cover of the eve of a federal election. Clearly the Island workforce is being used by Mr Garrett as a bit of “green fodder” to secure electoral preferences. The decision places ideological dogma before science and before the livelihoods of ordinary working Australians on the Island.

If Peter Garrett was genuinely interested in the environment on Christmas Island he would have heeded the advice given to him by his Expert Working Group just on twelve months ago. The Expert Working Group identified exotic invasive species – particularly yellow crazy ants – as being the primary environmental concern on the Island.

The Expert Working Group recommended a number of programs to try to “save” the island’s endemic species, including exotic eradication programs and better quarantine arrangements. These recommendations have largely been ignored by the Minister and no extra funding was provided in the 2010-11 federal budget to implement them.

Phosphate Resources offered up to \$50m in environmental offsets that could be used to implement these important programs. This has now been rejected without any attempt by Mr Garrett or his advisers to discuss the Company proposals. Without this substantial investment, the environmental integrity of Christmas Island remains at risk. Moreover, operations by the Commonwealth itself, over the past four years, have had a far more fundamental impact on the Island than any proposed mining activity.

The economy on Christmas Island is underpinned by two primary industries - mining and the refugee centre. Given that both political parties are committed to using other country processing facilities, this decision represents the death knell of the Island’s economy.

The proposals to move the Island’s economy to one focused on nature- based tourism are now also unlikely to be realised given the failure of Mr Garrett to fund the implementation of the recommendations of his Expert Working Group – recommendations that are seen as critical to preserving the environmental values of Christmas Island.

The Company will determine its approach to future mining on Christmas Island after it has received the reasons for decision and had the opportunity to discuss them with the incoming Minister for the Environment after the Federal election.

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