



+ A Pacific National driver gives a friendly wave as he rolls triple EMD locomotives Nos 8229, 8222 and 8258 and the very last 163-vehicle coal train No 3FP2 towards the Northern Power Station around noon on Wednesday 27 April. A large crowd had assembled at a former level crossing (in the middle distance) to witness the historic occasion.

# New opportunity emerges for Leigh Creek coal railway



**LEON OBERGER**

The ceremonious arrival of the last giant Leigh Creek coal train at Port Augusta's Northern Power Station around Noon on Wednesday 27 April has seen the emergence of a potential new opportunity for the railway.

The diversified Adelaide-based company Archer Exploration Ltd said the mine

and railway's "earlier-than-expected" closure had provided a "reversal of fortunes for Archer's magnesia vision for the Leigh Creek area".

Archer's chairman Greg English told **Track + Signal** his company's development of what was believed to be the world's largest deposits of magnesia had until now been restricted due to both the lack of infrastructure and an inability to access Alinta Energy's Leigh Creek railway.

Mr English said talks had been ramped up between his company, the South Aus-

tralian Government and third parties regarding the development of the Leigh Creek magnesia project because of "this unexpected window of opportunity".

And to further strengthen the initiative, an announcement to the Australian Stock Exchange by Archer on 24 May revealed the company and Bowmans Intermodal Pty Ltd (Bowmans) had "signed a heads of agreement to identify opportunities to jointly progress the development of rail infrastructure at Leigh Creek to support Archer's Leigh Creek Magnesite Project and a possible Bow-

mans Leigh Creek Intermodal Facility”.

Bowmans is a joint venture between Toll Group and Balco and AGT.

Archer, through its wholly owned subsidiary Leigh Creek Magnesite Pty Ltd, had a 100 per cent interest in the world’s largest cryptocrystalline magnesite deposit with a JORC 1999 resource aggregating 453 million tonnes grading 41.4pc MgO.

The magnesite is located in a 60km arc to the immediate west to south of Leigh Creek township and consists of five designated deposits (Mt Hutton, Mt Playfair, Pug Hill, Termination Hill and Witchelina).

The company claims the deposits account for some 48pc of the world’s known cryptocrystalline magnesite resources.

Leigh Creek, located just 20km from Mt Hutton, offered the amenities of a serviced town: housing, an airport, a school, services etcetera, Mr English said.

Meanwhile, Alinta Energy CEO Jeff Dimery – speaking to guests including Port Augusta Mayor Sam Johnson as the last 163-vehicle coal train rolled into the Northern Power Station – said: “Today marks an important milestone for our employees and the local community as we prepare for the closure of Flinders Operations on 9 May.

“The presence of the coal train has been a familiar sight for many in the local region and it was important that the final railing of coal be shared with the wider community.”

The day saw the end of 60 years of coal haulage from the Leigh Creek coal mine

Image ARCHER EXPLORATION



+ Archer Director Greg English is pictured at work in the field.

to firstly the Playford A and, later, the larger adjacent Northern Power stations located on Port Augusta’s south-east outskirts.

Playford A, named after former state premier Tom Playford, was commissioned in 1954 while the Northern Power Station was opened in 1985.

As reported in **Track + Signal** 19-4 in October-December 2015, Alinta Energy was closing the mine and power stations due to a reduction in SA industrial customers and an expanding reliance on renewables.

Up to 400 direct jobs have so far been shed in the towns of Port Augusta and Leigh Creek, with hundreds more affected by the closure’s flow-on effects.

The imposing 2.8km-long train, which had been contracted to Pacific National since 1999, carted an average three million tonnes of coal from Leigh Creek a year and generally consisted of 168 coal wagons plus one compressor wagon at the rear to help maintain train line air pressure for braking. **T+S**

**+ FOOTNOTE: Although the railway has technically been closed, it is understood that at least two more contracted passes over the 250km line are scheduled to be made by the Australian Rail Track Corporation’s sensitive rail-testing train, the AK Cars.**

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