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Bill aims to change Heritage Act

The introduction of a Bill to amend the Aboriginal Heritage Act has been met with a mixed response.

The Government claims elements of the Act, designed to protect Aboriginal heritage, are no longer fit for purpose.

Critics say amendments sideline the role of community consultation.

The Act has already been invoked this year for concerns about mining near heritage sites in the Goldfields.

In April, Mining and Pastoral Region MLC Stephen Dawson raised questions in Parliament over Focus Minerals' Coolgardie operations.

Mr Dawson said he had been approached by a community group concerned with mining activity at a State heritage site near the Big Blow mining operation.

The matter has been referred to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister Peter Collier said the Amendment Bill introduced on Wednesday would make

the State's heritage protection policy more contemporary.

"The pace of economic development in recent years, particularly within the mining and construction sectors, has highlighted inadequacies in the current legislation," he said.

"Modest changes are required to ensure our Aboriginal heritage can continue to be protected."

The Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia and the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies welcomed the move.

However, Mining and Pastoral Region MLC Robin Chapple said the amendments removed any kind of community involvement in the protection of Aboriginal heritage sites.

"These amendments concentrate all power over these matters in the hands of one public servant with questionable intentions," he said.

"It's an unmitigated disaster for Aboriginal heritage."