



# Light at end of tunnel

**By Ngaire McDiarmid and Amy Dry**

RAVENSTHORPE residents are seeing light at the end of the tunnel after BHP Billiton indicated a resolution would be made on the future of the mothballed \$2.2 billion nickel project by the end of the year.

Earlier this week, BHP cast aside speculation it would sell its Australian nickel assets in the near future, but has not ruled out eventually doing so.

The company also said it would make a decision on the Ravensthorpe project by the end of the year.

Potential investors have been shown around the mothballed BHP site in recent weeks, sparking rumours of a sale of the operation, which had employed about 1800 people.

Meanwhile, emerging lithium producer Galaxy Resources has received environmental approval to start building its plant within months and is standing by a commitment to hire a residential workforce.

**“We are very committed to having a residential workforce.”**

— IGGY TAN

Galaxy managing director Iggy Tan said the works approval meant the \$68 million construction phase could go ahead and was likely to employ 75 to 100 people.

“We are very committed to having a residential workforce and in a recent public meeting in Ravensthorpe, where about 130 people rocked up, we made that commitment,” he told the *Kalgoorlie Miner*.

He said Galaxy was in confidential talks to sell about 30 per cent of the project to help with finance and minimise the dilution of Galaxy stock.

The company intends to own a lithium carbonate plant near Shanghai to process its concentrate and would finalise the feasibility study for the plant within

three months.

Galaxy also upgraded its lithium resource by 26 per cent recently, which Mr Tan said supported a 15-year mine life.

He said Galaxy was waiting on mining approval for the project, which was expected within a month.

Meanwhile, O'Connor MP Wilson Tuckey said he was hoping BHP would offload the nickel asset for the benefit of residents in the town. “Reopening the mine would mean the town has a workforce back,” Mr Tuckey said.

“If BHP keeps the mine, they will have to dismantle the operation, so selling the mine would be a better financial deal for them.

“Again, if a transfer is forthcoming, the State Government needs to tell the (buyer) they want some guarantees the mine will continue in operation because no one wants a repeat of what happened (in January) when the mine closed.”