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Page 1 of 1

Mid-year start for new nickel mine

BRUCE MOUNSTER

A NEW nickel and iron ore mine for Beaconsfield might be under construction as soon as this year.

Sydney company Proto Resources and Investments has secured a mining licence and equipment finance for its Barnes Hill project, just 3km from the soon-to-be-closed Beaconsfield gold processing plant.

Proto managing director Andrew Mortimer said the proposed open cut mine, which could create as many as 100 long-term jobs, was expected to clear the development and environmental approval process by July.

Mr Mortimer said Proto's plan to re-occupy the site of Australia's first metal mine, should coincide with this year's closure of the 135-year-old Beaconsfield gold mine, costing about 140 jobs.

Historian Nigel Burch has linked the Barnes Hill mine site to Sir Joseph Banks, the famous naturalist who accompanied Captain Cook on the Endeavour.

After analysing samples, sent to England from the site, in 1805 Banks financed a drilling rig for Australia's first metal mine, associated with Lt Colonial William Patterson's Port Dalrymple settlement.

Mr Mortimer said Proto needed to dig down through an iron ore cap

before it reached its target, nickel and cobalt-bearing laterite ore.

Mr Mortimer said past mining had left the area in bad environmental shape and, through remediation, Proto was determined to leave the area in a better state than when it arrived.

Mr Mortimer expected a feasibility report, out next week, to confirm the project's viability. A construction start was likely in the second half of this year.

"Initial results are showing very positive returns on capital and operational expenditure from nickel metal sales," he said. "We should have approvals by July 1 this year."

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