



State Arms, Symbols and Emblems Amendment (Black Opal) Bill 2008

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Friday 11 April 2008.

Agreement in Principle

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.08 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The purpose of the State Arms, Symbols and Emblems Amendment (Black Opal) Bill 2008 is to recognise the black opal as the gemstone emblem for New South Wales. While schedule 3 of the State Arms, Symbols and Emblems Act 2004 lists the State's emblems, there is no gemstone emblem for the State. The proposal to recognise the black opal as the gemstone emblem for New South Wales has wide support. This includes support from the Australian Museum and the Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre. Black opal is a type of precious opal, or opal of gemstone quality. Precious opal is usually classified on the basis of the background colour of the stone and the type of colour pattern. The background for the colour play can be colourless, milky white, pale to dark grey, or black.

It is the most sought after type of precious opal as the very dark body colour enhances the depth of colour and the colour play is seen to its best advantage. The magnificent black opal ranks with diamond, emerald, ruby and sapphire as one of the most valuable gemstones in the world. Black opal is a suitable gemstone emblem for the State as it is the only gemstone that is mined in New South Wales in a significant amount. The only other gemstone mined in New South Wales is the sapphire; however, only a small amount is mined. In addition, sapphire is already recognised as the gemstone emblem for Queensland.

Internationally, the black opal is strongly associated with New South Wales, and in particular Lightning Ridge. Opal, in general, was discovered at Lightning Ridge in the late 1880s, with significant mining starting in the early 1900s. The opal industry in New South Wales is now largely based at Lightning Ridge, which has a population of about 1,200 people. This important regional centre also makes a large contribution to the tourism industry in New South Wales. The Australian Museum also advises that Lightning Ridge is now the world's major commercial producer of black opal and is world famous for its high-quality black opal. Specifically, Lightning Ridge supplies 95 per cent of the world's black opal. No other jurisdiction in Australia has the black opal as its gemstone emblem. While opal is already recognised as the gemstone emblem for Australia and South Australia, the black opal can be distinguished from opals generally due to its value.

The spectacular black opal is worthy of being declared the State's gemstone emblem as it is a world-famous gemstone and is strongly associated with Lightning Ridge and the State. Declaring the black opal to be the State's gemstone emblem is also likely to benefit the State's opal mining industry and the tourism industry. I am reasonably convinced that during the agreement in principle debate the bill will become known as the "Blackie bill"—and it probably should be recognised as such. I am sure there will be more to say about that during the debate. I commend the bill to the House.