



Uranium miner woos Czech population

AUSTRALIAN mining company Uran this week launched a charm offensive to win over Czechs living at a series of sites in the small central European State where it wants to extract uranium.

Company managing director Kate Hobbs yesterday started public meetings with mayors and citizens of three central Czech towns and villages to try and win their backing for its new demand for exploratory mining permits.

"Most of the people are neutral and some supportive," she said after the first meeting at the town of Pribyslav.

The meetings are being held near the site of the only existing uranium mine in the European Union, operated by Czech State-controlled mining company Diamo at Rozna.

Uran's previous bid to create a joint venture with Diamo was rejected by the Czech Government.

The new raft of applications, three in the central Vysocina region as well as for two sites at Osecna and Plouznice in the north of the country, is accompanied by an offer to pay each

local council 800,000 koruna (\$A51,400) a year while exploration work continues and 1.6 million koruna a year when commercial mining commences.

The charm campaign is aimed at overcoming the Czech Ministry of Environment's right to refuse permits or allow appeals against its refusal partly when there is no local support for mining.

The multinational Australian-based company is still waiting for a final verdict from Czech authorities on its initial application for another site in the centre of the country, Brzkov, which Hobbs earmarks as one of the most attractive mining prospects because around 7500t of uranium could be present there and "we understand the mining area better".

Hobbs says Uran hopes to get a foothold in the Czech Republic because of its ability to use modern mining know-how.

"There has been no attempt to use equipment developed since the Soviet era," she explained.

But Uran cautions that the current

high prices for uranium, caused by the global resurgence of the nuclear industry for which uranium is the fundamental fuel, might last five to 10 years before easing.

"If we got permission to go ahead, it would take three to four years before we could produce uranium," Hobbs added.

During the Cold War, communist Czechoslovakia was one of Moscow's main suppliers of the raw material for its nuclear warheads with a dozen major uranium mines dotted across the country.

In the early 1990s, after the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War, Czech mining plummeted to 25 per cent of its average over the previous decade as markets were swamped by fuel extracted from nuclear warheads.

The price of uranium has soared since the end of 2003 due to a revival of interest in nuclear power because of fears over global warming and the worldwide stability of fossil fuel supplies.



Czech your sight: Uran is on a goodwill mission to win over citizens and politicians in the Czech Republic.