

16 October 2019

Western Australia Zeros in on Critical Materials

While US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross was meeting with government officials in Canberra and Sydney recently, Perth was hosting the biggest critical materials conference the nation has seen according to CEO of the Perth USAsia Centre Professor Gordon Flake.

The Conference, In the Zone, was hosted by The University of Western Australia and the Perth USAsia Centre on 8 October, which focused on securing Indo-Pacific technology futures.

“The majority of critical materials are produced by China. When these materials are needed in trace elements in so many electronic devices, it is never good to have only a few countries monopolising the supply chain,” Professor Flake said.

The only Australian company currently producing rare earths outside of China, Lynas Corporation was represented, with CEO Amanda Lacaze letting conference delegates know that Western Australia was in an excellent position to invest in mining and processing of critical materials, but that there was more to be done.

Ms Lacaze called for government to deliver consistent regulation and stable operating environments.

Minister for Finance Mathias Cormann officially closed the conference, and confirmed that following Prime Minister Morrison’s meeting with President Trump, the Government is committed to increasing supply of critical minerals from Australia to the United States.

Professor Flake said the responsibility of the nation to becoming involved in producing critical materials goes beyond fiscal benefits.

“Apart from the fact that a small number of countries are monopolised by a small number of countries, which expose markets to political and economic shocks which threaten insecurity and volatility, mining of critical materials globally is implicated in many social problems, including poor labour standards, the use of child and unfree labour,” Professor Flake said.

Perth USAsia Centre has produced a report on [critical materials for the 21st Century Indo-Pacific](#), as has their sister centre, the United State Studies Centre, [which explores whether government intervention is needed](#).

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