

VHM Limited  
Goschen Rare Earths and Mineral  
Sands Project

# Chapter 22 Stakeholder and Community Engagement

November 2023





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# 22. Stakeholder and Community Engagement

This chapter provides an overview of the stakeholder and community engagement approach and activities undertaken as part of the Goschen Rare Earths and Mineral Sands Project.

## 22.1 Overview

VHM recognises the importance of public participation in developing and refining the Project. It has undertaken an extensive engagement program to ensure the community and interested stakeholders are informed, involved and able to actively contribute to the development of the Project and during the preparation of the EES. This chapter responds to the EES scoping requirements outlined by the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and is based on the Stakeholder and Community Consultation Plan prepared as part of the EES Scoping Requirement process.

The objectives of this chapter are to describe:

- Stakeholders identified and consulted during the engagement process.
- The methods and tools used during the EES process to engage stakeholders.
- The ongoing engagement process with stakeholders should the project be approved.

## 22.2 Consultation requirements

### 22.2.1 Legislation

Victorian legislation relevant to the stakeholder engagement process includes the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (Vic) (Environment Effects Act) and *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* (Vic) (MRSD Act):

- Under the *Environment Effects Act*, an EES is required to outline all stakeholder engagement conducted during the development of the EES and present all issues raised by the public, including responses by the proponent.
- Section 39A of the MRSD Act outlines licence holders duty to consult with the community during all stages of the project, including sharing information about any activities that may affect the community and providing the community with reasonable opportunities to express their views.

### 22.2.2 Guidelines

The following guidelines and advisory documents are relevant to the stakeholder engagement process:

- The Ministerial Guidelines for Assessment of Environmental Effects under *the Environment Effects Act 1978* (DSE, 2006). These guidelines outline the responsibility of the proponent to inform the public and consult with stakeholders, including the need to prepare a consultation plan.
- The Community Engagement Guidelines for Mining and Mineral Exploration in Victoria (DJPR, 2019) provide guidance about the requirements for community engagement under the MRSD Act and the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) (Mineral Industries) Interim Regulations 2018 (Vic).
- Public participation concepts developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

In accordance with Victorian Guidelines, VHM submitted its EES Consultation Plan to DTP in May 2019 outlining the proposed stakeholder and community engagement plan.

## 22.3 Scoping requirements

The scoping requirements for the EES outline the specific matters to be documented within the EES. Relevant to stakeholder and community engagement, the scoping requirements outline the matters to be addressed, including:

- *A program for community consultation, stakeholder engagement and communications proposed for implementation as part of the project, including opportunities for stakeholders to engage with the proponent.*
- *The preparation and exhibition of the EES consultation plan.*
- *Issues raised, and suggestions made by stakeholders or members of the public.*
- *The proponent's responses to these issues, in the context of the EES studies and the associated consideration of mitigation measures.*

The Minister for Planning issued the final scoping requirements in May 2019.

## 22.4 Stakeholder engagement

### 22.4.1 Engagement objectives

The key objectives of VHM's approach to engagement and consultation during the preparation of the EES are to outline:

- The key principles which underpin the approach to stakeholder engagement on the project.
- How potential project stakeholders have been identified and who they are.
- Key issues raised by the community and other stakeholders during engagement conducted to date.
- How the community and other stakeholders have been, and will be, consulted on the project during the EES process.
- The process for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement activities and incorporating stakeholder input into the EES.

Engagement and consultation during the preparation of this EES has ranged from informing stakeholders using a range of communication methods to involving them, where appropriate and possible, in decisions about the project design and management impacts. VHM has adopted the principles and practices of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) to guide its engagement and consultation approach.

All stakeholder communications have been kept concise, easy to understand and aimed at delivering clear and consistent messages. VHM has engaged with the community and stakeholders utilising a range of communication and consultation methods including face to face meetings, community information sessions, pop-up information stalls, webinars, Project Update newsletters, letterbox drops, project website, dedicated telephone line and email address, stakeholder reference group meetings and media advertising

### 22.4.2 Engagement principles

VHM is committed to establishing and maintaining meaningful and positive engagement with all relevant stakeholders on a consistent and continuous basis through the project and the EES process. VHM adopted and applied the following key principles:

#### *Open and transparent*

- Ensured consultation activities enabled open and transparent communication between VHM and all stakeholders through the timely distribution of project information that is clear, accurate and relevant.

#### *Collaborative and inclusive*

- Ensured that stakeholders were sufficiently informed about the project, understood their rights as stakeholders during the EES process, and the aspects of the project which they could influence.
- Enabled stakeholders to input into those aspects of the project that could affect them.

### Acting with integrity

- Ensured that consultation and engagement was conducted in a manner that fosters mutual respect and trust.
- Met statutory requirements and expectations of regulatory authorities in relation to the EES process.
- Clearly outlined the process of consultation during the EES process and the complaints process to ensure consistency with the regulatory requirements.

### 22.4.3 Engagement tools

Communication methods, materials and engagement tools utilised for the project are described in Table 22-1 below.

Table 22-1 Engagement Tools

Engagement tool	Description
<i>Digital communication</i>	
Website	VHM website <a href="http://www.vhmltd.com.au">www.vhmltd.com.au</a> updated promptly as new project information becomes available.
Project email address	Email address established for enquiries relating to the project – <a href="mailto:community@vhmltd.com.au">community@vhmltd.com.au</a>
Email updates	Issued at regular intervals to keep community informed (for those who have opted for email communications).
Frequently Asked Questions	Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) established on website to address anticipated questions from stakeholders and community during the EES process.
Webinars	Engaged with and provided information to stakeholders and community about EES technical studies and gathered feedback on issues and concerns to be considered in EES technical studies – these sessions were held during regional flood events to continue the EES engagement process while roads and communities were inaccessible by normal means.
Media	Radio used to inform community about project engagement events and advise how to provide feedback about the project.
Social media	General information uploaded to the VHM Limited LinkedIn feed.
<i>Print communication</i>	
Project Update newsletters	Written communications developed to provide updates on the project and the EES process. Hard copies made available at village stores and post offices, during face-to-face engagement sessions, and soft copies emailed to community and stakeholder distribution list, and uploaded to website.
Information Sheets	Written communications provided key information about the project. Hard copies made available during face-to-face engagement sessions, soft copies emailed to community and stakeholder distribution list, and uploaded to website.
Information displays/posters	Posters explaining EES technical studies used during face-to-face engagement events and soft copies uploaded to website.
Letterbox drops	Project Update newsletters, fact sheets and letters distributed to village stores, post office boxes and community letterboxes through local progress associations to advise of project updates and engagement events during the EES process.
Media advertising	Print advertising to inform stakeholders and community about engagement events and direct questions and feedback to community telephone, email or website contact details.
Public notices/displays	Public notices placed in local and state newspapers to promote activities in line with engagement best practice and regulatory obligations.
<i>Direct engagement</i>	
Community telephone	Dedicated community line to make enquiries about the project or provide feedback about the project and EES process – 0429 462 524. All contacts to this number have been logged and responses assigned to relevant project team member
Key stakeholder briefings	Face-to-face meetings with key stakeholders and which became direct digital communications during COVID-19 restrictions

Engagement tool	Description
Personal meetings	Face-to-face meetings with project stakeholders that were initiated by either VHM or the stakeholder. These meetings will continue as an opportunity to discuss issues such as land access and compensation (with landholders). Meetings were held with key regulatory stakeholders in relation to project design and planning to ensure regulatory requirements are met. Meetings were also held with Traditional Custodians, local businesses, State government agencies and other interested groups.
Landholders	Face to face meetings with landholders to work through project issues and access to land for exploration drilling activities or survey work for EES studies.
Stakeholder and Community Reference Group meetings	Forum for open communication between VHM and local community representatives and stakeholders provided feedback on the project and community sentiment. This group comprised a representative from both Gannawarra Shire and Swan Hill Rural City Council, business owners, residents within or surrounding the project area, development industry representatives, education/training representative, agricultural representative, VHM management and an independent facilitator.
Site tours	Site tours of the proposed mine site offered to key stakeholder groups provided insight into the mining process, physical features of the site and potential impacts. Site tours were offered to TRG members, referral agencies, industry groups and emergency service providers.
Community events	Attendance and participation in local events such as pop-up project information stalls at local markets, and also supporting and sponsoring community events and initiatives where appropriate for the project.
Technical information sessions	Technical information presented to the community using communication tools and methods appropriate to the audience – with the aim of briefing on EES technical studies and assessments.
Community Information sessions	Community information sessions (face to face and via webinar) were conducted to provide opportunity for stakeholders and community members to meet project team members and ask questions and express concerns. These sessions were particularly relevant to present EES technical studies and enabled community members to ask questions of technical specialists and to input any local knowledge and experience into the EES process.
Media releases	Issued at key project milestones to advise broader community on project status.
Land access agreements	Engaged with landholders on and around the proposed project footprint to determine mutually agreeable land access arrangements and ensure appropriate land access agreements are established for mutual benefit.
Informal feedback surveys	Informal and anonymous feedback sought at formal engagement sessions to seek attitudes towards the project and to identify areas of concern that may need action. Surveys will be ongoing throughout life of project.
<i>Government agency referrals</i>	
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) referral document: published on 27 September 2018	<a href="http://epbcnotices.environment.gov.au/entity/annotation/ede0dacd-ba04-e911-931a-00505684324c/a71d58ad-4cba-48b6-8dab-f3091fc31cd5?t=1685331480099">http://epbcnotices.environment.gov.au/entity/annotation/ede0dacd-ba04-e911-931a-00505684324c/a71d58ad-4cba-48b6-8dab-f3091fc31cd5?t=1685331480099</a>
EES referral: published on the DTP website on 10 October 2018 for formal comment	<a href="#">Microsoft Word - MBR037688 Attachment 2 - Reasons for Decision - Goschen Mineral Sands (Referral 2018R004).doc.DOCX (planning.vic.gov.au)</a>
Draft EES scoping requirements: published on the DTP website in April 2019	<a href="https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/642176/Goschen_Draft-EES-Scoping-Requirements_Apr-2019_For-Exhibition.pdf">https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/642176/Goschen_Draft-EES-Scoping-Requirements_Apr-2019_For-Exhibition.pdf</a>
Final EES scoping requirements: published on the DTP website in May 2019	<a href="https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/642178/Goschen_Final-EES-Scoping-Requirements_May-2019.pdf">https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/642178/Goschen_Final-EES-Scoping-Requirements_May-2019.pdf</a>
EES documents and summary brochure: provided on the VHM website with links to the site from the DTP website	<a href="https://www.vhmltd.com.au/ees">https://www.vhmltd.com.au/ees</a>



## 22.4.4 Engagement phases

Engagement activities can be separated into distinct phases as shown in Table 22-2 below.

Table 22-2 Engagement phases

Phase and indicative timing	Summary of phase and engagement objectives
EES referral (August 2018- February 2019)	Since project inception, VHM has engaged with the community and stakeholders to generate and raise public awareness of the project and to inform and involve the community and stakeholders in the design and development of the project. Assessments also commenced during this phase in respect of terrestrial biodiversity to ensure all studies were completed on an annual basis.
EES scoping (February - May 2019)	In September 2019 the Minister for Planning announced an EES was required for the project and VHM submitted a draft study program and consultation plan to DTP for consideration. DTP established a technical reference group to review the EES studies and released the draft scoping requirements for comment in April 2019. In May 2019 VHM prepared the EES community consultation plan, engaging with the community to inform and increase understanding of the project, the EES and EPBC Act processes.
EES preparation (May 2019 – February 2023)	Investigations and technical studies were carried out for the preparation of the EES. Engagement activities centred on sharing the outcomes of studies and providing opportunity for community to comment and provide feedback for further project refinement. Community information sessions were held (face-to-face and virtual) and written Project Updates were distributed to the community and other interested parties to continue the engagement, notwithstanding an inability to meet face-to-face or to hold community information sessions due to COVID-19 restrictions. The TRG was convened during this phase to review the EES specialist studies and draft documentation.
EES public review period (Q3 2023)	This phase is the formal consultation process to support the EES process and includes public exhibition of the EES and associated documents. This phase will also involve the appointment of an Inquiry Panel to review the EES and public submissions. A report will be prepared by the Panel following conclusion of the Inquiry to inform the Minister's assessment. The key engagement objectives for this phase are to support the public exhibition process by providing information on the EES and submission process.
Minister's assessment	This is the final step in the EES process which determines whether the likely environmental effects of the project are acceptable. Engagement objectives are to ensure community and stakeholders are informed of the assessment, and the next steps to be taken in obtaining approvals and licences from relevant statutory authorities, and continuing community consultation and notification about the project.
Construction (late 2024 onwards)	If the project receives statutory approvals following the EES process, stakeholder engagement during the construction phase will be reviewed to ensure the best method of engagement is adopted. The key objective of engagement during construction will be to keep the community informed of project progress and to continue to consult with potentially affected members of the community where required about specific mitigation measures. The EES identified mitigation measures which will be incorporated into the conditions of statutory approvals, environment management plans and consultation plans for the construction and operation of the project. These measures include consultation and notification requirements.
Operation (late 2025 onwards)	If the project is approved and constructed, VHM will continue to consult with stakeholders and community throughout the life of the project. VHM and its contractors will comply with statutory approval conditions and management plans which require stakeholder consultation and clear communication.

## 22.5 Stakeholder identification

Since August 2018, VHM compiled a database of project stakeholders through responses to widely advertised community meetings and information sessions, formal meetings, informal conversations, and email exchanges.

VHM identified stakeholders with the potential to experience direct impacts or perceived impacts from the project and those with an interest and/or ability to influence the project's outcome. This included community, business, government and non-government interests.

### 22.5.1 Landholders

Seven (7) residential dwellings were identified within a two-kilometre radius of the project area, including two of which have agreements with VHM to be either vacated or purchased prior to the Project proceeding. Outside of these two landholders other local landholders have been consulted through meetings and project briefings, email exchanges, telephone calls and Project Update newsletters. Landholders have, and will continue to be, invited to participate in advertised project briefings, community information sessions, stakeholder and community reference group meetings and site tours.

In addition to the above, VHM established a voluntary Neighbour Agreement with all owners of dwellings within 3.5km of the Mine Site Area (proposed MIN boundary). VHM initiated a specific round of engagement with the relevant parties on the agreement to outline its objectives and general principles which are:

- Entirely optional, with no conditions to restrict parties to comment on EES
- Based on an acknowledgement that the Project although not directly impacting residents will change the general amenity
- An annual financial payment for the life of the Project.

### 22.5.2 Traditional custodians

The Traditional custodians of the project area are the Wemba Wamba/Barapa Barapa Working Group (WWBBWG). VHM first engaged with the WWBBWG in May 2018 and regular and ongoing contact has continued since that time through meetings and project briefings, Project Update newsletters and website information. These consultations will continue through life of project.

In the development of the project's Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) VHM engaged with WWBBWG and Aboriginal Victoria. This included cultural heritage survey fieldwork and to nominate management measures for inclusion in the CHMP.

### 22.5.3 Federal and state government

This stakeholder group included Federal and State government representatives, including:

- Local members of the Victorian and Australian parliaments (Member for Mallee; Member for Murray Plains)
- State government ministers (Minister for Energy and Resources; Minister for Environment, Minister for Planning; Minister for Regional Development; Minister for Transport and Infrastructure.

Methods used to engage this stakeholder group included project briefings, meetings, direct communication via telephone and email conversations, invitations to participate in site tours and community information sessions, and the provision of Project Update newsletters.

### 22.5.4 Agencies and statutory authorities

Representatives of various land and asset managers relevant to the project and the surrounding area were assembled to form a technical reference group (TRG) for the project. The group was convened and chaired by DTP on behalf of the Minister for Planning, with membership drawn from government agencies, regional authorities and local government. The TRG provided advice to VHM during the preparation of the EES.

The member organisations of the TRG for the project are listed in Table 22-3 below.

Table 22-3 Technical Reference Group

Technical Reference Group (TRG) members	
Department of Transport and Planning Impact Assessment Unit	Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water Corporation (GMMWater)
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action Loddon-Mallee Region (biodiversity, planning)	Mallee Catchment Management Authority (Mallee CMA)
Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) - Earth Resources Regulation (ERR)	North Central Catchment Management Authority (North Central CMA)
Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)	Department of Transport and Planning - VicRoads
First Peoples-State Relations Victoria	Invest Victoria

Technical Reference Group (TRG) members	
Heritage Victoria	Gannawarra Shire Council
Environment Protection Authority (EPA)	Swan Hill Rural City Council
Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW)	

### 22.5.5 Utility and asset owners

This stakeholder group includes:

- Goulburn-Murray Water.
- Lower Murray Water.
- Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water.
- Power utility providers.
- Telecommunications providers.

This group was engaged through meetings, project briefings, direct communications via telephone and emails, and community information sessions.

### 22.5.6 Local government

This stakeholder group included the Gannawarra Shire Council and the Swan Hill Rural City Council.

Methods used to engage local government include meetings, project briefings, providing information for site tours, Project Update newsletters and website information. VHM has also established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with both councils as a commitment to collaborate and partner to achieve the best social and economic outcomes for the communities within these local government regions.

### 22.5.7 Emergency service providers

The emergency service stakeholder group included Victoria Police, Victorian State Emergency Service (SES), Country Fire Authority (CFA), and Ambulance Victoria.

Methods used to engage with this group include meetings, project briefings, providing invitations for site tours, Project Update newsletters and website information.

### 22.5.8 Representative bodies

This stakeholder group included representative bodies that have a supporting role to their constituents such as the Minerals Council of Australia and Victorian Farmers Federation.

Methods used to engage these groups included meetings, direct communication via telephone and email conversations, providing Project Update newsletters and website information.

### 22.5.9 Local businesses and service providers

This stakeholder group incorporated a wide range of local business enterprises including agricultural businesses, irrigators/stock and domestic water users, accommodation providers and real estate agencies, freight/logistics companies, tourism operators, retailers, training and recruitment services, health care providers, schools, technical and tertiary institutions, and hospitals. It also encompassed local business promotional representatives such as Swan Hill Incorporated and Kerang Traders Inc.

Methods used to engage this stakeholder group included meetings, direct communication via telephone and email conversations, drop-in community information sessions, the provision of Project Update newsletters, website information and advertisements in local media.

### 22.5.10 Community and special interest groups

This stakeholder group included:

- Special interest groups such as: Landcare groups (Murray Mallee, Lalbert, Kerang, Lake Charm); Birchip Cropping Group; Wildlife Victoria, and Sustainable Living in the Mallee.
- Progress Associations (Lalbert, Kerang, Ultima, Quambatook, Cohuna, Koondrook).
- Sporting clubs and associations: Football-Netball Clubs (Lalbert Mallee Eagles, Quambatook, Ultima, Lake Boga, Wandella, Murrabit, Koondrook); Cricket Clubs; and Little Athletics.
- Community service clubs and organisations: Lions Clubs (Lalbert, Quambatook, Ultima, Kerang, Swan Hill, Cohuna, Lake Charm-Mystic Park, Murrabit and District); Rotary Clubs (Kerang, Swan Hill); CWA (Swan Hill); and Swan Hill Business and Professional Women.

A range of consultation methods were used to engage this stakeholder group including meetings, drop-in community information sessions, provision of Project Update newsletters, website information, and advertisements in local newspapers and on local radio, and invitations to participate in the community and stakeholder reference group. Briefings and presentations were provided to interested community groups on request.

VHM has also engaged with stakeholders and displayed project material at local community market days in Kerang, Cohuna and Murrabit, and the Mallee Machinery Field Days in Speed.

### 22.5.11 Broader community

The broader community included residents and community members in towns and settlements across the region who may not live or work in the immediate area surrounding the project area (including residents in Lalbert, Ultima, Quambatook, Kerang, Lake Charm, Mystic Park, Lake Boga, Swan Hill and surrounds). These communities are within a one-hour commuting distance to the project area.

Methods used to engage this stakeholder group include drop-in community information sessions, letterbox drops, provision of Project Update newsletters via email, website information, and advertisements in local media.

### 22.5.12 Media

The local media stakeholder group included:

- Newspapers – Gannawarra Times (Kerang), Swan Hill Guardian
- Radio – ABC Swan Hill/Mildura, MixxFM.

Methods used to engage local media includes direct communication via face-to-face and telephone/email communications, media releases, Project Update newsletters, and drop-in community information sessions.

## 22.6 Overview of engagement to date

Initial consultation and engagement commenced in 2018 to advise and inform the local community and other key stakeholders about the project. As part of the consultation planning, VHM has recorded all communications and engagement and in 2022 implemented a database to record all subsequent communications and engagement. This database was also used to provide monthly updates to DTP in accordance with the requirements of the Environment Effects Act.

Consultation with key stakeholders, landholders and community members in the vicinity of the project location and across the broader region has been ongoing since May 2018. VHM has compiled a database of project stakeholders through responses to widely advertised community meetings and information sessions, formal meetings, informal conversations and email exchanges.

VHM has consulted, and continues to consult, with all affected landholders and neighbours, local businesses, Gannawarra Shire Council, Swan Hill Rural City Council, water authorities, community interest groups, and the local and broader community.



## 22.6.1 Consultation summary

A summary of the project's key engagement activities is set out below in Table 22-4.

Table 22-4 Key engagement activities

Date of engagement	Method of engagement
25 May 2018	Briefing with Traditional Custodians WWBBWG
14 August 2018	Information stand - Lalbert
15 August 2018	Community information Session - Lalbert
16 August 2018	Information stand - Lalbert
September 2018	Project Update newsletters (x 2) issued
19 October 2018	Fact Sheets (x 2) issued (about VHM and regulation to develop project)
January 2019	Project Update newsletter issued
27 February 2019	Stakeholder Reference Group meeting No 1
3 April 2019	Stakeholder Reference Group meeting No 2
5 June 2019	Stakeholder Reference Group meeting No 3
5 August 2019	Stakeholder Reference Group meeting No 4
July 2020	Fact Sheet issued (Road safety)
September 2020	Project Update newsletter issued
September 2020	Fact Sheets (x 2) issued (exploration program)
February 2022	Briefing with Traditional Custodians WWBBWG
26+27 March 2022	Information stand - Gannawarra Air Muster - Kerang
29 March 2022	Technical Reference Group pipeline route site tour
8 April 2022	Letter to landholders advising VHM is back 'on the ground'
16 April 2022	Information stand – Murrabit Market
17 April 2022	Information stand – Cohuna Market
19 April 2022	Project Update newsletter issued
28 May 2022	Information stand – Kerang Community Market
4 June 2022	Information stand – Murrabit Market
6 June 2022	Briefing with Gannawarra Shire Council
6 June 2022	Briefing with Swan Hill Rural City Council
25 June 2022	Information stand – Kerang Community Market
8 July 2022	Project Update newsletter issued
27 July 2022	Community Information Session - Lalbert
28 July 2022	Community Information Session - Kerang
28 July 2022	Community Information Session – Swan Hill
1 August 2022	EES Technical Study posters (x 5) issued
3+4 August 2022	Information stand - Mallee Machinery Field Days, Speed
27 September 2022	Community Information Session - Quambatook
28 September 2022	Community Information Session - Kerang
28 September 2022	Community Information Session - Lalbert
29 September 2022	Community Information Session – Swan Hill
29 September 2022	Community Information Session - Ultima
1 October 2022	EES Technical Study posters (x 6) issued

Date of engagement	Method of engagement
10 October 2022	Briefing with Gannawarra Shire Council and Councillors
10 October 2022	Briefing with Swan Hill Rural City Council and Councillors
15 November 2022	Community Information Session - webinar
16 November 2022	EES Technical Study posters (x 5) issued
22 November 2022	Community Information Session - webinar
30 November 2022	Community Information Session - webinar
25 March 2023	Information stand – Kerang Community Market
2 April 2023	Information stand – Swan Hill Farmers Market
6 April 2023	Information stand – Kerang Traders Easter Festival
22 April 2023	Information stand – Kerang Community Market

## 22.7 Overview of feedback received

Engagement involved a broad range of stakeholders, community groups and individuals since early 2018 and prior to commencing preparation of the EES. These early conversations established project awareness in the local community and assisted VHM to identify key areas of concern.

### 22.7.1 Project responses to stakeholder comments

Since inception of the project, VHM has incorporated feedback from stakeholders and the community into the design of the project. A number of revisions have been made to the project since inception following consultation and discussion with landholders and other stakeholders.

A summary of responses to stakeholder comments is included in Table 22-5 below.

Table 22-5 Responses to stakeholder comments

Issues raised	Actions to respond
<p>Social and community impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Land values increasing, increasing Council rates.</li> <li>Liveability, farm business viability, sustainability for future generations.</li> <li>Flow on impacts from decrease in production, farm supplies, fuel etc.</li> <li>Breakdown in social cohesion – no compensation for those landholders outside the mining area but will be impacted by mining.</li> <li>Job availability and skills development for locals, including aboriginal employment.</li> <li>Accommodation requirements for mining workforce in an already tight regional housing market.</li> <li>Cost of housing and rentals increasing due to demand from mining and driving locals out due to affordability.</li> <li>Local businesses losing employees to higher paid mining roles and difficulty to replace employees.</li> <li>Local businesses and services not afforded opportunities to support mining operations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early and proactive engagement by initiating consultation with affected landholders to understand what they need and want to know in order to avoid reactive communications if issues have not been identified or anticipated.</li> <li>Building strong relationships and secure landholder agreements to purchase land to be mined and secure land access agreements with nearest sensitive receptors.</li> <li>Raise awareness that that land will be mined and rehabilitated progressively. Land to be mined will be temporarily unavailable for farm production for a period of approximately five years (depending on weather conditions) and that land will be rehabilitated to pre-mining agricultural production levels so that agricultural production can continue.</li> <li>Developing a neighbour agreement to support, provide assistance or remuneration to offset the altered amenity for the landholders outside the mining area within a defined radius (3.5km) who will be impacted by mining activities.</li> <li>Establishing a workforce accommodation strategy in liaison with local councils, developers, local business and accommodation providers to minimise impact on existing accommodation availability and costs for local residents, seasonal agricultural workers and regional tourism.</li> <li>Establishing a schools engagement program and a community benefit fund dedicated to establishing traineeship, apprenticeship and scholarship opportunities through technical and tertiary education, aboriginal skills development programs, working closely and partnering with local businesses and training organisations. The schools engagement program and community benefit fund are in early planning phase and will be developed further during construction phase and implemented in operational phase.</li> </ul>

Issues raised	Actions to respond
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to local purchasing and procurement policy and preference to utilise local businesses, services and suppliers. This includes providing opportunities for upskilling to ensure that mining sector quality and standards can be met.</li> <li>• Developing an Aboriginal skills development program which is in early planning phase and to be developed further during construction phase and implemented in operational phase, in consultation with the Traditional Owners.</li> </ul>
<p>Water – surface and groundwater</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra demand for water detrimental to environment, existing water users, community.</li> <li>• No clear sustainable water source identified other than GMW who are already near capacity.</li> <li>• Certainty of existing water supply without interruption.</li> <li>• Mining impacting on water table – tailings and wastewater.</li> <li>• Saline water management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactive engagement by initiating consultation with landholders and stakeholders, including local water authorities, to understand what they need and want to know in order to avoid reactive communications if issues have not been identified or anticipated.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of environmental management systems and regulatory process to manage surface water.</li> <li>• Development of project images and diagrams to illustrate surface water and groundwater modelling and movement.</li> <li>• Raise awareness that mining will remain above groundwater table to avoid direct intercept of the groundwater.</li> <li>• Due to discharge to groundwater from the mine tailings seepage, VHM will be required to apply for an A18 permit through the EPA.</li> <li>• Development of project diagrams to illustrate the tailings management process and key role of tailings in mine site rehabilitation.</li> </ul>
<p>Soils and rehabilitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to rehabilitate successfully having seen previous failures (Ouyen).</li> <li>• Bonds insufficient to cover rehabilitation liabilities.</li> <li>• Proper removal of redundant mining plant.</li> <li>• Engagement relating to rehabilitation continues until mining is completed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early and proactive engagement by initiating consultation with landholders to understand what they need and want to know in order to avoid reactive communications if issues have not been identified or anticipated.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of environmental management systems and regulatory process to which rehabilitation activities must comply.</li> <li>• Development of project diagrams and images to illustrate and promote rehabilitation process.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of VHM's complaints management procedure, availability of dedicated community engagement personnel and 24/7 telephone and email contact points available for life of project, i.e., up to and including the closure phase.</li> </ul>
<p>Traffic and transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impacts of increased traffic on local roads, already in disrepair.</li> <li>• Road closures impacting access to neighbouring farmland.</li> <li>• Transport of radioactive materials.</li> <li>• Council has limited capacity to fund road improvements.</li> <li>• Robinvale train line in poor state for extra freight on the line.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early and proactive engagement by initiating consultation with landholders and other key stakeholders to understand what they need and want to know in order to avoid reactive communications if issues have not been identified or anticipated.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of traffic management plan and regulatory process to manage road impacts and use in the region.</li> <li>• Development of project images and diagrams to illustrate impacted roadways and indicative transport routes.</li> <li>• Raise awareness that the existing Ultima intermodal terminal is to be used for product export from the region.</li> <li>• Raise awareness that neighbouring landholders will have access to their paddocks at all times to be able to conduct and continue farming operations.</li> <li>• Engagement with landowners who may require diversion routes following the closure of roads.</li> </ul>
<p>Dust contamination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dust contaminating crops, livestock, people, rainwater tanks, recreation areas.</li> <li>• Health impacts, eg increased asthma.</li> <li>• Livestock/produce losing 'clean and green' image due to dust.</li> <li>• Continuous dust and radiation monitoring around residences, farm buildings and paddock boundaries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early and proactive engagement by initiating consultation with landholders and other key stakeholders to understand what they need and want to know in order to avoid reactive communications if issues have not been identified or anticipated.</li> <li>• Limiting the number of operational mining areas at any one time.</li> <li>• Daily monitoring of weather patterns and adjusting mining activities to maintain lower dust levels from mining activities.</li> <li>• Mining schedule to limit areas exposed to wind erosion.</li> </ul>

Issues raised	Actions to respond
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release of radionuclides.</li> <li>• Dust contaminating water supply.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of best practice dust emission mitigation measures including use of water sprays, misting systems and water trucks.</li> <li>• Visual assessment of fugitive dust generation, especially that leaving the site boundary and dust deposition on vegetation surrounding the mine site.</li> <li>• Ongoing dust and radiation monitoring at nearest residences for life of project.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of environmental management systems and regulatory process to which rehabilitation activities must comply.</li> </ul>
<p>Health impacts, including mental health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to mine heavy metals safely.</li> <li>• Mental health of community – impacts throughout planning and operations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactive and early engagement by initiating consultation with landholders and other stakeholders to understand what they need and want to know in order to avoid reactive communications if issues have not been identified or anticipated.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of the suite of environmental and other government-approved work management plans with which VHM must remain compliant to be able to continue with mining operations.</li> <li>• Provision of clear project maps, diagrams and images showcasing and explaining mining operations to help alleviate concerns of 'the unknown'.</li> </ul>
<p>Amenity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual impact of mining operations.</li> <li>• Managing noise.</li> <li>• Managing light pollution.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising community awareness of reduced project footprint from that originally proposed to minimise direct impact to local community. When originally referred under the <i>Environment Effects Act 1978</i>, the Goschen project involved a substantially larger disturbance footprint. The project footprint was reduced - one of the key reasons for this was that less landholders would be directly and indirectly impacted, including less roads required.</li> <li>• Raising community awareness that the project has significantly reduced in size to that originally proposed and that the extent and severity of amenity impacts would be reduced by virtue of a smaller impacted area, resulting in impacts to a lower number of receptors.</li> <li>• Provision of information on revised project footprint through direct briefings with key stakeholders including landholders, Councils, and broader community via community information sessions, newsletters and website.</li> <li>• Development of project maps and other visuals to illustrate project footprint, building design, noise mitigation infrastructure, and lighting designs that limit and control intensity.</li> <li>• Clearly promoting noise management plan and regulated noise limits to which VHM must remain compliant.</li> </ul>
<p>Biosecurity/weeds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of weeds.</li> <li>• Weed control on stockpiles, leased land, roadsides, non-mining areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactive and early engagement by initiating consultation with landholders and other stakeholders to understand what they need and want to know in order to avoid reactive communications if issues have not been identified or anticipated.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of weed control monitoring program on areas not currently under agricultural production.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of weed monitoring and control measures undertaken on disturbance areas, soil stockpiles and rehabilitation areas.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of procurement safeguards and quarantine procedures implemented to manage import of any equipment or machinery from interstate or overseas that meet requirements under the Biosecurity Act 2015.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of the suite of environmental and other government-approved work management plans to which VHM must remain compliant to be able to continue with mining operations.</li> <li>• Provision of clear project maps and images showcasing and explaining mining operations to help alleviate concerns of 'the unknown'.</li> <li>• Maintaining integrity of erosion and sediment control measures and effectiveness of site drainage.</li> </ul>



Issues raised	Actions to respond
<p>Ecological impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearing native vegetation.</li> <li>• Flora/fauna studies undertaken in drought conditions, not true reflection of biodiversity status.</li> <li>• Loss of bird habitat.</li> <li>• Road reserve impacts.</li> <li>• Loss of Mallee biodiversity - not maintained for future generations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced project footprint from that originally proposed to reduce impacts on environment and community.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of stakeholders and community that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Native vegetation has been extensively mapped so there is sound knowledge of where significant and protected ecological vegetation classes of vegetation are located.</li> <li>- remnant patches of native vegetation in the mining area will remain undisturbed.</li> <li>- the water supply pipeline will be placed in road reserves to avoid and minimise impacts to existing roadside native vegetation.</li> <li>- road reserves will be improved by reducing existing weed infestations.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Emergency access, fire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to farm business and residences during mining for emergency and serviceability access.</li> <li>• Fire risk from operating heavy machinery during total fire bans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early and proactive engagement by initiating consultation with landholders and other key stakeholders to understand what they need and want to know in order to avoid reactive communications if issues have not been identified or anticipated.</li> <li>• VHM providing a fire-fighting truck and trained personnel to be accessible during all site exploration drilling activities.</li> <li>• VHM will establish a crew of trained emergency response personnel with firefighting and other emergency response capability which may be deployed to assist the local community for firefighting or other emergency situations if required.</li> <li>• Raise awareness that landholders and neighbours will have access to their paddocks at all times to be able to conduct and continue farming operations and maintain emergency services accessibility.</li> </ul>
<p>Power source</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source of electrical power for the project</li> <li>• Adverse impacts on neighbouring properties with brown outs or black outs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early engagement with landholders and other stakeholders.</li> <li>• Raise awareness that VHM will establish its own power generation plant to service all mining and processing activities and not impact on existing community power supply.</li> </ul>
<p>Aboriginal heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preservation of significant aboriginal sites.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active and regular engagement with WWBBWG.</li> <li>• Development of Cultural Heritage Management Plan which encompasses all personnel working on site to be briefed on cultural heritage management as part of on-site inductions and undertaking cultural awareness training prior to being allowed to work at site.</li> </ul>
<p>Radioactivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release of radionuclides into the environment.</li> <li>• Potential health impacts – bioaccumulation.</li> <li>• Behaviour in groundwater and surface water.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early and proactive engagement by initiating consultation with landholders to understand what they need and want to know in order to avoid reactive communications if issues have not been identified or anticipated.</li> <li>• Raise awareness that natural background radiation is ubiquitous and radiation levels in the project area are consistent with geologically similar areas in Australia.</li> <li>• Provision of fact sheets about radiation.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of VHM undertaking continuous background air quality monitoring, groundwater monitoring, and developing environmental management systems and regulatory processes to monitor and manage radioactivity and remain compliant with legislation.</li> </ul>

Issues raised	Actions to respond
<p>Communications with VHM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miscommunication and misinformation.</li> <li>• Transparency throughout EES phase.</li> <li>• Vague/conflicting information coming from VHM.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early and proactive engagement by initiating consultation with stakeholders and community to understand what they need and want to know in order to avoid reactive communications if issues have not been identified or anticipated.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of VHM's key contact points which include a dedicated community and stakeholder engagement professional, direct contact through 24-hour community contact telephone number and dedicated email address through which to channel enquiries and feedback.</li> <li>• A number of face-to-face engagement sessions held in different locations and at different times of the day to discuss the project and key technical studies that make up the EES.</li> </ul>

### 22.7.2 Feedback addresses in the EES

VHM has sought to address key community and stakeholder issues raised during the preparation of the EES.

The following categories have been used to group key issues and summarise the concerns expressed during EES preparation:

- Environmental impacts.
- Community and economic impacts.
- Agriculture and land rehabilitation.
- Traffic and transport.
- Amenity, health and public safety.

Planning Panels Victoria is responsible for managing any submissions received during the EES exhibition and submission period and the overall submission process.

Table 22-6 below identifies the project component that each issue relates to, the EES chapter and technical report where responses are provided in the EES.

Table 22-6 Summary of Feedback

Issue	Project component	What was assessed in the EES	Location in the EES
Environmental impacts			
Concerns about process water run-off leaving the mine site and managing water in high rainfall events similar to that which caused the 2022 floods across the region.	Construction, operation and closure	An impact assessment study was undertaken to evaluate potential on-site surface water impacts of the project – this study examines surface water impacts within the mining lease and is designed to ensure all water remains within the mining licence boundaries.  A separate regional surface water impact assessment was also undertaken to consider the impact of the project on surface water run-off across the region.	EES Chapter 13 Surface water and EES Technical Report H2: Mine site surface water impact assessment.  EES Chapter 13 Surface Water and EES Technical Report H1: Regional surface water impact assessment.
Concerns raised about the mining operation impacting groundwater, particularly tailings leaching into the water table.	Operation and closure	A groundwater impact assessment study was undertaken to assess the potential for the project to impact groundwater and the hydrogeological system.	EES Chapter 14 Groundwater and EES Technical Report I: Groundwater impact assessment.
Concern about the impacts to remaining native vegetation and fauna in the region and ability to preserve existing patches of remnant and roadside native vegetation and general ecology along the proposed water supply pipeline route.	Construction and operation	A native vegetation and flora impact assessment study, together with a vertebrate fauna ecology study, were undertaken to assess project impacts on biodiversity. Subsequently further impact assessment studies were undertaken to assess the impact on aquatic ecology to review aquatic fauna at Kangaroo Lake; and an arboricultural impact assessment was undertaken to assess the trees along the proposed water supply pipeline route and provide recommendations to minimise any potential losses.	EES Chapter 7 Flora and fauna ecology and EES Technical Report B: Vertebrate Fauna Ecology.  EES Chapter 7 Flora and fauna ecology and Native Vegetation and EES Technical Report A: Flora Ecology.
Community and economic impacts			
Concerns raised about social cohesion – some farmers benefitting from the mining operation, others not, but still bearing impacts from increased traffic on local roads, noise, visual amenity.	Construction and operation	A social impact assessment has been undertaken to consider the potential issues and impacts on social values of the community, including community cohesion and wellbeing.	EES Chapter 22 Community and stakeholder engagement and EES Technical Report O: Social Impact Assessment.
Decreased value of farmland post-mining.	Operation and closure	A draft rehabilitation plan has been prepared to outline the key objective to achieve safe, stable and sustainable broadacre agriculture on completion of rehabilitation and mine closure works.  The agriculture impact assessment study has been undertaken to assess the project impacts at the regional and local levels and propose mitigation measures to identify and reduces impacts to as low as practicable.	EES Chapter 19 Rehabilitation and closure and EES Technical Report P: Rehabilitation and closure.  EES Chapter 16 Agriculture and EES Technical Report L: Agriculture Impact Assessment Study.
Concerns raised over local employment – locals having opportunity to work on the project as well as the project providing indigenous employment and training opportunities, but also depleting local businesses of workers who pursue higher income from mining jobs.	Construction and operation	A social impact assessment study has been undertaken to identify the potential and likely social impacts as a result of the project and recommend a number of mitigation measures to deal with local employment and upskilling.	EES Chapter 22 Community and stakeholder engagement and EES Technical Report O: Social Impact Assessment

Issue	Project component	What was assessed in the EES	Location in the EES
Concerns about sourcing labour force and skills that may not be available locally and being able to accommodate an expanding workforce in an already tight housing market across the region.	Construction and operation	The social impact assessment study has identified the likely impacts of a skilled workforce that may need to be imported to the region for construction and initial operations and recommends mitigation measures to deal with accommodation requirements.	EES Chapter 22 Community and stakeholder engagement and EES Technical Report O: Social Impact Assessment.
Concerns about opportunity not being afforded to local businesses to service the project and sourcing suppliers and services from outside the local area.	Construction, operation and closure	The economic impact assessment study has identified the likely impacts that development of the project would bring to the Loddon-Mallee region across the life of the project. VHM has also developed a local employment policy which is one of several mitigation measures outlined in the social impact assessment to address local employment and service provision.	EES Chapter 22 Community and stakeholder engagement and EES Attachment IV Economic Assessment of the Project and EES Technical Report O: Social Impact Assessment.
Concern expressed about smaller communities in the region not being able to benefit economically and socially from the project, rather than benefits concentrated in the larger townships of Swan Hill and Kerang.	Construction and operation	The economic impact assessment study outlines the potential economic benefits to the Loddon-Mallee region. The social impact assessment study addresses the potential for smaller surrounding communities to benefit socially and economically during the life of the project.	EES Chapter 22 Community and stakeholder engagement and EES Attachment IV Economic Assessment and EES Technical Report O: Social Impact Assessment.
Concern expressed on how nuisance issues and complaints can be raised with VHM and whether a project shopfront will be established in Kerang or Swan Hill.	Construction, operation and closure	Forming part of the EES, the project's draft work plan contains the community engagement plan which details VHM's formal complaints management process. In 2023 VHM will establish an official project shopfront at its base in Tate Drive, Kerang.	EES Chapter 21 Environmental Management Framework and Attachment I Draft Work Plan.
<b>Agriculture and land rehabilitation</b>			
Concern expressed on ability to successfully rehabilitate the mining area to pre-mining agricultural production levels and the land value being significantly decreased as a result of reduced agricultural production capacity.	Operation and closure	A draft rehabilitation and closure plan has been prepared to outline the key objective to achieve safe, stable and sustainable broadacre agriculture on completion of rehabilitation and mine closure works. The agriculture impact assessment study has been undertaken to assess the project impacts at the regional and local levels and propose mitigation measures to identify and reduces impacts to as low as practicable.	EES Chapter 19 Rehabilitation and Closure and EES Technical Report P: Rehabilitation and closure plan. EES Chapter 16 Agriculture and Soils and EES Technical Report L: Agriculture Impact Assessment Study.



Issue	Project component	What was assessed in the EES	Location in the EES
Traffic and transport			
Concern expressed about upgrade and maintenance of local roads to safely accommodate the increased volume of traffic, and particularly that landholders be given priority to move large pieces of farming equipment to access land and maintain agricultural production immediately neighbouring the mine footprint.	Construction, operation and closure	The transport impact assessment study addresses impacts to transport associated with the project. Key components of the study include the stakeholder engagement plan to involve key stakeholders who will help shape the traffic management plan that will ensure construction and operational transport activities meet stakeholder, operational and regulatory requirements.	EES Chapter 10 Traffic and transport and EES Technical Report E: Traffic and transport.
Amenity, health and public safety			
Concern expressed about the visibility of the mining operation and how light pollution can be managed.	Construction and operation	The landscape and visual impact assessment study has been undertaken to address the visual amenity and measures for managing light during night time operations.	EES Chapter 9 Landscape and visual and EES Technical Report D: Landscape and visual.
Concern raised about the level of dust generated during mining operations and potential for excess dust deposition on crops in neighbouring farmland.	Construction, operation and closure	The air quality impact assessment study details the key impacts from the project and the best practice mitigation measures recommended to ensure dust emissions remain at controllable and low levels, including implementation of an air quality monitoring plan with continuous monitoring.	EES Chapter 12 Air quality and EES Technical Report G: Air quality. EES Chapter 21 Environmental management framework.
Concern about radioactivity in the mineral sands, impacts to human health, and the likelihood of radioactivity in the groundwater after mining.	Construction, operation and closure	The radiation impact assessment study has been undertaken to assess exposure receptors, exposure pathways, radioactivity levels due to the project, calculate exposures and doses and compare results to Australian standards.	EES Chapter 17 Radiation and EES Technical Report N: Radiation. EES Chapter 21 Environmental management framework.
Concern raised about noise levels and how noise will be managed during 24/7 operations.	Construction and operation	The noise impact assessment study has been undertaken to understand background noise levels and recommend a number of key mitigations for project design and subsequent operations to ensure noise levels remain below regulatory requirements.	EES Chapter 11 Noise and EES Technical Report F: Noise.

## 22.8 Ongoing engagement

VHM is committed to continuing to inform, consult and involve community members and stakeholders during the next phase of the project and the EES process.

The following communications and engagement activities are planned to inform the public on the project and the EES and encourage participation through formal exhibition.

- Community information sessions.
- Responding to email and telephone enquiries.
- Communications about the EES exhibition, including
  - Project Update newsletters.
  - Signage.
  - Media and advertising.
  - Website information.
  - Email updates.
  - Social media.

Should approvals be obtained, the project will move to the construction phase. During this phase, one of the key priorities for VHM will be to inform community of construction timing and associated impacts prior to works commencing. VHM welcomes any feedback during this phase to ensure continuous improvement.

VHM will undertake the following communications and engagement activities during the construction phase of the project:

- Drop-in Information Centre at VHM's Kerang Warehouse.
- Community information sessions.
- Stakeholder and Community Reference Group.
- Environment Reference Group.
- Local business information briefings.
- Project Update newsletters.
- Website information.
- Email updates.
- Responding to email and telephone enquiries.
- Pop-up information stalls at Lalbert, Kerang and Swan Hill.
- Media and advertising.
- Community complaints hotline/email address.
- Site tours (if appropriate).