



Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To whom it may concern,

Submission to inquiry into factors shaping social licence and economic development outcomes in critical minerals projects across Australia

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Primary Industries inquiry into factors shaping social licence and economic development outcomes in critical minerals projects across Australia.

My electorate of Indi does not have a critical minerals project currently operating, however has a strategic minerals project at Bethanga – the Bethanga Porphyry Copper-Gold Project operated by Nexus Minerals. There are 22 renewable energy projects that are pending planning approval, under construction or operating in Indi.¹ This submission is informed by the extensive work I have undertaken on community engagement and benefit in the transition to renewables.

This submission focuses on Terms of Reference point 1 – *the effectiveness of engagement practices with local communities, Traditional Owners, and other stakeholders*.

It makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Best-practice community engagement and benefit should be a requirement for critical minerals projects in Australia.

Recommendation 2: Community engagement requirements should be consistent across all levels of government.

Community Engagement and benefit are essential for developing social license

I have long advocated for clear standards for community engagement and benefit from the transition to renewable energy. Early and meaningful community consultation improves outcomes for communities and the environment.² Community engagement and benefit are important in creating positive social license for all development projects, including critical minerals projects.

Best practice community engagement and benefit, such as that outlined in The Energy Charter's '*Better Practice Social License Guideline*', can improve project outcomes and community acceptance of a

¹ Victorian Department of Transport and Planning, *VicPlan*, <https://mapshare.vic.gov.au/vicplan/>

² The Wilderness Society (2022) *Who Holds the Power Report*, <https://wilderness.org.au/images/resources/WhoHoldsThePowerReport.pdf>

project.³ Principles of best practice community engagement must be embedded within the regulatory framework guiding critical and strategic minerals projects. Some of these principles include:⁴

- Early, ongoing and meaningful engagement with affected landholders, communities, and councils
- Delivering long-term economic regional benefits to communities hosting infrastructure or operations
- Genuine partnerships with landholders and their communities to deliver positive outcomes

Initiatives like the Clean Energy Council's Best Practice Charter 2025 highlight that some renewable energy developers are increasingly improving the ways they undertake meaningful community engagement, and this is delivering localised regional economic benefit.⁵ With clear requirements for community engagement, this could be the case across all development proposals, including critical minerals.

Recommendation 1: Best-practice community engagement and benefit should be a requirement for critical minerals projects in Australia.

Community engagement requirements should be consistent across all levels of government

I often hear from industry, and in particular renewable energy proponents, that they are willing to undertake robust community engagement and deliver community benefit funds, but they want consistent and transparent application of these requirements.

There is currently a patchwork of community engagement requirements across jurisdictions and industries. Just last year, the Parliament passed significant changes to our national environmental laws. These reforms allow the Minister for the Environment and Water to create National Environmental Standards (Standards). I have called on the Government to establish a Standard for Community Consultation and Engagement.

When setting community engagement requirements for critical minerals projects, these should be consistent and aligned with existing policies. Consistency sends an important signal to project developers – that community engagement is a vital part of a development proposal. It also supports communities to understand the processes they can expect to participate in.

Recommendation 2: Community engagement requirements should be consistent across all levels of government.

³ The Energy Charter (2023), *Better Practice Social Licence Guideline*, https://www.theenergycharter.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/The-Energy-Charter_Better-Practice-Social-Licence_2023_GUIDELINE.pdf

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Clean Energy Council (2025), *Best Practice Charter 2025*, https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/getmedia/38729138-a3dd-4fc2-b761-73c31ab55ba3/best-practice-charter_summary-report_2025.pdf



Conclusion

The Commonwealth Government have announced significant funding for critical minerals projects through Future Made in Australia plan and the Critical Minerals Production Tax Incentive.⁶ It is wholly reasonable that critical and strategic minerals projects receiving Commonwealth support should be required to undertake meaningful community engagement and deliver long-term regional benefit.

I call on the government to establish consistent community engagement and benefit minimum standards for all critical minerals projects. This will improve outcomes for projects and communities alike.

Sincerely,

Helen Haines MP

27 February 2026

⁶ The Hon Madeleine King MP, Minister for Resources (2024), *Media release: Securing Australia's critical minerals, exploration and processing industries*, <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/king/media-releases/securing-australias-critical-minerals-exploration-and-processing-industries>