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Mineral Policy Institute

Fact Sheet

Mining Policy Principles

What minimum principles must be met if mining is to contribute to a just and equitable global energy transition? *The extraction of any minerals involves some environmental and social cost.*

As part of the global commitment to reach net zero by 2050, Australia must scale down fossil fuel extraction and scale up production of 'energy transition minerals' like lithium, nickel and others. With the 'Future Made in Australia' plan, it is positioning itself as a global leader in critical minerals mining and production, with $14.3 billion in government grants, loans and credits directed to critical mineral miners.

Some industry groups are pushing for deregulation of the mining sector to fast-track minerals development. Others are attempting to greenwash types of mining that pose unique threats to the environment — for example, uranium mining and deep-sea mining — by claiming they are necessary for the energy transition.

The global energy transition is an opportunity to fix the mistakes of the past. Instead of imposing extractive projects with poor environmental protection and outcomes on communities, we must aim for projects based on the inalienable rights of communities and First Nations, community partnerships and benefit sharing, the highest environmental standards, transparency and accountability mechanisms, and First Nations' sovereignty.

We must have minimum standards for mining governance in Australia — and these principles should apply to all mining, not just critical or energy transition minerals.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

- *First Nations rights and cultural heritage* — Traditional Owners are sovereign decision-makers over minerals on their land, with the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent, including the right to veto a project.
- *Community rights in decision-making* — Affected communities have the right to know, participate in, and challenge mining decisions, not just be informed after the fact.
- *Regional planning* — Projects should be assessed for their cumulative impact across a whole region, not approved one at a time in isolation.
- *Corporate & government accountability* — Transparent ownership, public reporting, and real avenues for communities to seek remedy when companies or governments fail to meet their obligations.

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- *Environmental protection & social impact assessment* — Strong, independently enforced environmental laws, with biodiversity offsets as a last resort rather than a default approval pathway.
- *Mining legacies* — Companies must be held responsible for proper mine closure and rehabilitation, so costs don't fall on taxpayers when a mine closes or a company collapses.
- *Critical minerals strategies* — Critical minerals projects get no special treatment: no fast-tracking, no politically expanded mineral lists, and no exemption from the other six categories.

A new project is proposed near you. What now?

The Principles aren't just a governance wishlist — they're a checklist you can hold a real proposal up against. Here's a four-step way in.

1. What is not in the proposal? Read the proposal for what is in it, but also for what is not in it. Has the company engaged all affected Traditional Owner groups, or just one Native Title body? Is there a social or cultural impact assessment — and is it public? Silence on these is itself a red flag (Principles 1 & 3).

2. How are you being asked to participate? Are you being consulted before the mine plan is finalised, or handed a design that's already locked in? The Principles distinguish the right to know, participate and challenge from merely being informed. If the process only offers "comment", that's consultation without consent (Principle 2).

3. Ask what happens when the mine closes. Australia has over 50,000 abandoned mines. Look for the rehabilitation bond, the closure plan, and who is legally on the hook if the company folds (Category 4).

4. If it's badged "critical minerals", look twice. That label is often used to argue for fast-tracking or lighter assessment. The Principles say critical minerals projects get no special treatment — they should face the same cumulative impact assessment as any other mine (Category 7).

TAKE IT FURTHER

Use the Principles to frame a submission, brief a journalist, or start a conversation with neighbours facing the same proposal. The full document (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.22091140) sets out the complete reasoning behind each category.

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