

Submitted to Review of Mineral Licensing - Call for Evidence
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Introduction

Chapter 1 - Community Protections and Social Licence

1.1 What do you consider best practices for meaningful and sustained community engagement in minerals licensing?

Please give your response below.:

No response

1.2 How can local communities be better involved in decision-making in all aspects of minerals licensing?

Please give your response below.:

Consideration could be given to the following:

- i) Involvement of communities in the co-design of applications.
- ii) Provision of plain language summaries of technical documents to assist stakeholders.
- iii) Provision of resources / funding for local community involvement or to fund provision of technical support to communities offers the potential for successful project development. Conversely communities may, legitimately, use such funding to oppose projects.

1.3 What mechanisms should be in place to ensure transparency and accountability in community consultations?

Please give your response below.:

- i) All regulatory-related reporting should be made available by either the company or government.
- ii) Maximise the use of modern participation tools (interactive maps, online consultation platforms, digital twins).

1.4 What are the societal benefits/threats from minerals licensing? How can these be mitigated/optimised?

Please give your response below.:

Mineral licensing can deliver economic growth, resource security and jobs, but poses risks including environmental harm and community opposition. Early, transparent and inclusive stakeholder engagement ensures communities are informed and able to shape outcomes. Open access to environmental, social and economic data, with coordinated and open communication across industry, experts, regulators and communities is key to building and maintaining trust to achieve balanced, well-informed decisions.

1.5 How should the regulatory framework encourage operators to gain a social licence to operate, and sustain this throughout the licence period?

Please give your response below.:

Regulations and financing requirements often embed expectations for community engagement to build a social licence to operate. Companies also set their own policies, with approaches varying by project and local context (e.g. specific and place-based considerations, characteristics and needs of affected communities). Ongoing engagement is widely recognised as essential, as social licence can be lost quickly if trust in operators or regulators declines.

Chapter 2 - Securing the Supply of Minerals

2.1 How can DfE support innovation that will support circularity in particular, materials recovery, secondary materials markets, recycling and circular design in manufacturing?

Please give your response below.:

Much mining generates significant waste, but circular approaches can recover value. Government can support this by enabling reuse of tailings and waste rock, promoting design for recyclability of key inputs such as water and reagents, and incentivising innovation, pilot projects and scale up. Progress also requires funding, supportive regulation, markets for secondary materials, and collaboration across value chains.

2.2 What are the key opportunities and challenges for sustainable minerals development?

Please give your response below.:

Sustainable minerals development can be understood as the need to balance the supply of minerals and energy resources with economic benefits, while protecting environmental and social values.

A number of key opportunities to highlight include:

- Mining can provide essential materials for the wider economy (e.g. metals for infrastructure, energy and low carbon technologies), while generating

employment, often with relatively high wages and delivering tax revenues and royalties to governments.

- Mining projects can stimulate local economies, improve infrastructure, and support skills development and education due to demand for a wide range of technical and professional roles.
- Opportunities exist to improve sustainability through better project design, more efficient resource use, and enhanced environmental management practices across the life of a mine.

Key challenges to consider include:

- Mining can create significant local socioeconomic changes, including increased housing costs, pressure on services, and shifts in employment away from traditional sectors. These changes require careful management to ensure benefits are shared equitably.
- Mining involves significant land use change and can pose risks to biodiversity, water resources, air quality, and climate through greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants. These impacts must be effectively mitigated through robust assessment, planning, and operational controls.
- Ongoing public engagement, transparency, and trust are critical. Regular public reporting of environmental and social performance plays an important role in demonstrating responsible management and maintaining community confidence (social licence to operate).

A major challenge is ensuring that land is successfully rehabilitated at the end of a mining project's life (mine closure) and that long-term environmental conditions and socio-economic changes are appropriately planned and managed, and that funding for such activities remains available until measures are complete even when mining activities have long finished.

2.3 What support is needed for businesses to participate in the minerals supply chain?

Please give your response below.:

There are many examples of mining projects where regulatory requirements, corporate policies and/or funding agencies mandate that local procurement be maximised to the greatest extent possible. It can also be very important that local business opportunities are identified during project planning, including engagement with local communities and businesses, as well as potentially resourcing existing or new businesses to take up the opportunities presented by a new mining project.

A good example where this has been achieved is Rio Tinto's support and investment into local indigenous businesses to support their iron ore operations in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

2.4 Both circular economy practices and primary extraction have been identified as necessary to secure the supply of minerals for the green transition, and other essential industry. What role should we have in ensuring a secure supply of minerals?

Please give your response below.:

The United Kingdom relies on imports to meet a significant proportion of its demand for minerals and metals. Government therefore has an important role in strengthening supply resilience. One option, for example, is supporting the development of domestic mining projects, where they are economically viable and socially and environmentally acceptable, thereby reducing the negative environmental impacts arising from long-distance imports and contributing to domestic economic development.

In addition, government has a wider role in ensuring secure supply by enabling circular economy practices, supporting recycling and secondary materials markets and fostering innovation across the value chain. Establishing clear and efficient regulatory frameworks, supporting investment in technology and skills, and promoting supply chain diversification are also key to maintaining a secure and sustainable supply of minerals.

2.5 How can the sector contribute to local employment, skills development, and regional growth?

Please give your response below.:

Mining projects can be large employers, providing for a range of job types such as truck driver and trades (plumbers, electricians, carpenters, etc., along with roles such as accountants, lawyers, engineers and scientists). As such, mining projects can (and many do) support initiatives for training, boosting skills in the region. Regional growth can be supported by the broader economic activity of mining related business support services. Although this needs to be carefully planned and assessed to ensure that both positive and negative effects (see previous responses) are identified and managed to ensure positive growth.

2.6 What are the potential economic benefits of mineral development?

Please give your response below.:

As noted in previous responses, mineral development can generate a range of economic benefits, including employment, opportunities for local business and provide government revenue through royalties and taxes. In addition, export of minerals and mineral products can contribute positively to the balance of payments.

These benefits, however, can only accrue if negative risks (including environmental and social) are identified and well managed to ensure that mineral development delivers net benefits.

2.7 What are the potential economic negative impacts of mineral development?

Please give your response below.:

Mineral development can give rise to a range of negative economic impacts. As noted in previous responses, these can include upward pressure on housing and rental costs, increases in the overall cost of living and movement of labour from existing sectors to min-ing (which increase costs of labour for other businesses).

Additional risks can include economic dependence on a single dominant local employer leading to reduced diversification in local economies. It is therefore important to ensure that all potential negative risks and impacts are identified as early as possible and that mitigation measures are implemented (along with monitoring strategies) to manage them effectively.

Chapter 3 - Legislative and Regulatory Framework

3.1 Are current legislative frameworks adequate to manage mineral exploration and extraction?

Please give your response below.:

No response

3.2 What changes, if any, would you recommend to improve the legislative framework?

Please give your response below.:

No response

3.3 How should mineral development align with broader environmental, economic, and energy policies?

Please give your response below.:

Mining projects can support broader policies in a range of ways:

- mandating the use of renewable energy supporting energy resilience and climate mitigation and net zero objectives,
- supporting skills development and training (from labour through trades to university levels),
- mandating local procurement for various types of inputs and services,
- supporting resourcing of environmental initiatives such as rewilding or expanded conservation activities. For example the emerging concept of 'nature positive mining' whereby a mining project works with local communities and environmental stakeholders to ensure that aspects such as biodiversity are better in the region overall after a mining project closes than existed prior to it.

3.4 What role should other stakeholders play in regulating mineral licencing?

Please give your response below.:

No response

3.5 Should the current maximum licence area of 250km² be changed? If so, please include evidence of the benefit of the proposed change.

Please give your response below.:

No response

3.6 What are your views of the current six-year term for an MPL. If you believe a change is required, what should the maximum term be, and what evidence supports this change?

Please give your response below.:

There are many different operating regulatory models for mineral exploration around the world, all with strengths and weaknesses. It is important that any model is adapted for local needs and concerns.

3.7 Do you consider the current £450 fee for an MPL appropriate? If not, what would a more appropriate fee be and what evidence supports your view?

Please give your response below.:

No response

3.8 Is the current consultation process adequate? If not, what improvements would you suggest? Please provide evidence to support your suggestions.

Please give your response below.:

No response

Chapter 4 - Environmental Issues

4.1 What are the environmental impacts associated with mineral exploration?

Please give your response below.:

Mineral exploration generally has relatively low but still important environmental impacts. These can include the construction of temporary access tracks or roads, land disturbance associated with drilling activities.

Borehole drilling, which typically involves the use of diesel powered equipment may generate quantities of drilling fluids muds and waste water which require appropriate management to avoid contamination of the soil and water courses. Mineral exploration can also affect biodiversity through habitat disturbance and the unintended spread of weeds.

Although these impacts are typically localised and temporary in nature, careful planning, site management and rehabilitation are important to minimise environmental disturbance and ensure that sites are restored following exploration activities.

While primarily environmental in nature, exploration activities can also raise social concerns, including land access issues for landowners and uncertainty about the potential development of future mining projects.

4.2 What are the environmental impacts associated with mineral extraction / mining?

Please give your response below.:

Mineral extraction / mining can give rise to a wide variety of environmental risks and impacts. These may include effects on biodiversity, land use, surface water and groundwater resources, air quality (including greenhouse gas emissions) and soils.

The nature and extent of these impacts vary between projects, depending on factors such as local geology and hydrogeology, project design, operational practices and especially the effectiveness of mitigation measures.

It is therefore essential that potential impacts are identified through appropriate assessment and are managed throughout the life of a project. Residual impacts after completion of a mining project will depend on activities during mining and the quality of site rehabilitation. In many cases ongoing monitoring is required for some period to assess the effectiveness of rehabilitation and ensure that environmental conditions, such as those relating to biodiversity, water, land use and air quality, are being maintained.

4.3 What environmental safeguards need to be put in place for mineral exploration?

Please give your response below.:

A variety of safeguards can be used during mineral exploration. These include environmental surveys undertaken prior to any exploration activity to establish existing (baseline) conditions against which any changes in the future can be compared.

Financial assurance mechanisms, such as surety bonds, offer a mechanism to encourage compliance with regulatory requirements (and provide funding for remediation should a company be unable to fulfil its obligations). Such bonds are returned once exploration and site rehabilitation have been completed and deemed to have met agreed requirements.

During exploration, monitoring during exploration works and careful site rehabilitation after works have been completed is required. Following completion of activities, careful site rehabilitation is essential to restore disturbed areas and minimise long-term environmental effects.

4.4 What environmental safeguards need to be put in place for mineral extraction / mining?

Please give your response below.:

Environmental safeguards for mineral extraction / mining typically involve a combination of regulatory and voluntary measures applied across the life cycle of a project.

Prior to development, comprehensive environmental assessment processes are applied according to regulatory requirements and mitigation measures identified. During the operational life of a mine, environmental management systems are implemented to monitor and manage impacts, with reporting often made publicly available by the operator or regulators to ensure transparency and accountability.

An important safeguard is the setting of rehabilitation goals and targets. This may include provision of a financial bond which is set aside to encourage compliance and reduce financial risks to governments and communities in the event that an operator is unable to fulfil its obligations.

In addition to meeting regulatory requirements, many mining companies adopt recognised international standards and frameworks to demonstrate environmental performance. Examples include the international standard for environmental management (ISO 14001) and industry codes (e.g. International Council on Mining and Metals or ICMM). Alternatively, companies may develop their own system to meet specific regulatory and/or community needs. As such, there can be a mix of regulatory and voluntary approaches which work to achieve high environmental standards for a mining project.

4.5 What types of mitigation measures are appropriate to address environmental impacts from mineral exploration?

Please give your response below.:

As noted in response to 4.3, mitigation measures can include baseline surveys, active monitoring during exploration, post rehabilitation surveys and potentially a financial bond (or similar surety). The measures applied will vary depending on the nature of exploration activity undertaken (e.g. drilling, soil sampling, aerial or land based geophysics, etc).

4.6 What types of mitigation measures are appropriate to address environmental impacts from mineral extraction / mining?

Please give your response below.:

As noted in response to 4.4, mitigations may include formal systems and regulatory and/or voluntary approaches. All mitigation measures will need to be designed for each mining project to meet local conditions, expectations and requirements. It is important that monitoring is commensurate with identified risks and that regular reporting be publicly available, to demonstrate compliance and help to achieve improved community understanding of successful site operations.