

Avonbank Mineral Sands Project EES: Scoping Requirements process

Avonbank Mineral Sands Project EES – Final Scoping Requirements FAQs

September 2020

What is the purpose of the scoping requirements?

WIM Resource Pty Ltd (WIM Resource) is preparing an environment effects statement (EES) for the Avonbank Mineral Sands Project, and the EES scoping requirements set out the matters that need to be investigated and documented within the EES.

Final EES scoping requirements have been approved by the Minister for Planning and are available on the DELWP website: <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/browse-projects/projects/avonbank-mineral-sands>

Why is an Environment Effects Statement (EES) required for the Avonbank Mineral Sands Project?

An EES is the most comprehensive and robust assessment process available and will provide for an integrated and transparent examination of the proposed project and its effects, which is necessary because of the array of potential effects, public interest and the different statutory approvals typically required for this type of major project.

The Minister for Planning determined under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* that WIM Resource should prepare an EES for the Avonbank Mineral Sands Project in August 2019. In the procedures and requirements, the Minister identified key environmental risks that would need to be addressed in the EES, namely:

- effects on the land uses of the site and surrounding areas, including the implications for agricultural productivity;
- effects on land stability, erosion and soil productivity associated with the construction and operation of the project, including progressive rehabilitation works;
- effects of project construction and operation on air quality, noise and visual amenity of nearby sensitive receptors (particularly residences);
- effects on surface water environments, including local waterways and the broader catchment, as well as groundwater (hydrology, quality, uses and dependent ecosystems);
- solid and liquid waste that might be generated by the project during construction and operation;
- both positive and adverse socio-economic effects, at local and regional scales, potentially generated by the project, including increased traffic movement and indirect effects of the project construction workforce on the capacity of local community infrastructure;
- effects on biodiversity and ecological values within and in the vicinity of the site, and associated with adjacent road reserves and crown land, including native vegetation, listed threatened ecological communities and species of flora and fauna, and other habitats values; and
- effects on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural heritage values.

The EES documentation will need to include a detailed description of the proposed project and rigorous assessment of its potential effects on the environment and approaches to mitigation. The EES will inform the public and stakeholders and provide the basis for seeking feedback, which will be considered by an inquiry. Ultimately it enables the Minister to issue an assessment of the environmental effects of the project at the end of the process. The Minister's assessment will inform statutory decision-makers responsible for the project's approvals.

The project was also referred to the Commonwealth under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). A delegate for the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment determined on 3 July 2020 that the project is a controlled action and hence requires assessment and approval under the EPBC Act.

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The provisions for the Australian Government's controlled action decision under the EPBC Act are:

- listed threatened species and communities (section 18 and 18A); and
- protection of the environment from nuclear actions (sections 21 and 22A).

What studies are WIM Resource doing to further identify any associated impacts of the project?

In preparing the EES, WIM Resource is undertaking a range of technical investigations to assess the potential impacts of the project. These investigations include biodiversity, groundwater and surface water, noise, vibration, heritage, radiation, socioeconomic conditions, landscape and visual, land use, traffic and transport, air quality and soils and landform.

These studies will inform strategies to avoid, minimise or mitigate potential impacts which will form an important part of the EES documentation.

What are the final Scoping Requirements?

The set of matters to be investigated and documented in each EES are tailored to the project and its environmental risks. The draft scoping requirements for a project are prepared by the department on behalf of the Minister and then exhibited for 15 business days for comment by interested parties. The draft scoping requirements for the EES were informed by the proponent's referral and draft EES study program, as well as advice from agencies represented on the Technical Reference Group (TRG) and advice from the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

The scoping requirements for the WIM Resource EES represent a broad scope of issues that must be addressed by WIM Resource in the EES. Assessment of effects as required by the scoping requirements must include discussion of all potential direct, indirect, on-site and off-site effects as result of the proposed project. Consistent with the Minister's decision for requiring an EES, the final scoping requirements cover a range of matters that need investigation, including impacts on biodiversity values, water (catchment and hydrology) values, amenity values such as air quality, noise and social amenity in general, social and land use values including agriculture, as well as landscape and visual values and cultural heritage.

As no submissions were received on the draft scoping requirements only minor editorial changes have been made to the scoping requirements to update them from draft to final.

Was there public consultation for the draft scoping requirements?

An integral part of the EES process is the proponent engaging the public and stakeholders to identify and respond to their issues in conjunction with their EES studies.

WIM Resource has already commenced consultation with stakeholders and the community on the EES. WIM Resource has also prepared a consultation plan for the EES, outlining the opportunities and approaches for its community engagement during the preparation of the EES. The plan is published on the DELWP website.

Under its EES consultation plan the proponent needs to inform the public and stakeholders about the EES process and its associated investigations, ensuring it provides opportunities for input and engagement on these investigations.

Draft scoping requirements for the EES were exhibited for a period of 15 business days and closed 11 August 2020. Notice of the draft scoping requirements' exhibition was publicised on the DELWP website and via advertisements in major newspapers.

No submissions were received on the draft scoping requirements.

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What happens now the Minister has issued the final scoping requirements?

The proponent will proceed with the necessary information-gathering and investigations to inform the EES. This is expected to take at least several months. It will conduct its studies and prepare the EES in close consultation with DELWP and a technical reference group consisting of lead statutory agencies and the relevant local council.

The proponent will also need to implement its EES consultation plan to engage the public and stakeholders about the EES process and its associated investigations, ensuring it provides opportunities for input on these investigations. The consultation plan was reviewed and amended in consultation with DELWP and the TRG prior to being published on the DELWP website.

When the EES is ready, it will be reviewed by DELWP, and the Minister for Planning will decide whether to authorise the EES to be exhibited. If authorised, the EES will be advertised for public comment for a period of 30 business days. There will be further opportunities for public comment on the project's environmental effects when the EES is exhibited.

The EES and the submissions received, together with the draft planning scheme amendment, will be referred to an inquiry to be appointed under the *Environment Effects Act 1978*.

An inquiry will consider all the information before it, including from a formal hearing process and will report to the Minister, who will then make an assessment and provide it to decision-makers (including Earth Resources Regulation and the Commonwealth with regard to the required approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*).

After the Minister has made an assessment, the report of the inquiry and the Minister's assessment will be published on the DELWP website.

When does WIM Resource expect to release an environmental effects statement?

The EES is expected to be released in 2021 (timing to be confirmed), when it goes on public exhibition for public comment. During this period WIM Resource will undertake planned engagement activities.

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What is the Avonbank Mineral Sands Project?

The proposed project is located approximately 15 km northeast of Horsham, with a disturbance footprint of approximately 3,600 ha. The Avonbank deposit contains approximately 300 million tonnes of ore and is proposed to produce a heavy mineral concentrate (HMC) containing zircon, rare earths and titanium minerals over a projected mine life of 30 years.

The proposal includes developing a mineral sands mine, mining unit plants, wet concentrator plant, starter ore and overburden stockpiles, slurry pipelines and additional infrastructure (roads, offices, warehouses, workshops, laydown areas, fuel storage, pipelines, power lines and rail loading facilities).

Conventional dry mineral sands mining and processing techniques would produce between 350,000 and 600,000 tonnes/annum of HMC. Progressive mining and rehabilitation throughout the mine life will return most of the materials back to the pit. HMC will be transported to port via road or rail for export overseas. The workforce is expected to stay in accommodation in Horsham and the local area.