

(Doc Id: 1134643)

9 February 2026

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**Subject: Submission: Social Licence and Economic
Outcomes in Critical Minerals Project**

Reference:

Dear Jamie

Please see below Forbes Shire Council's submission re: Social Licence and Economic Outcomes in Critical Minerals Project as requested:

Overview

Critical minerals development is central to Australia's economic resilience, clean energy transition, and strategic participation in global supply chains. While market demand and technical feasibility underpin project viability, long-term economic outcomes are strongly influenced by the presence of a robust **social licence to operate**. Projects that fail to secure community trust face delays, increased costs, and reduced investor confidence, weakening national productivity.

The Australian Government has an important role in shaping policy settings that support both economic performance and community confidence across jurisdictions.

Importance of Early and Genuine Community Engagement

Early, transparent, and genuine community engagement is a key factor shaping social licence. While approvals are largely administered by states, the Commonwealth can provide leadership by setting clear national expectations for best-practice engagement.

Effective engagement includes:

- Commencing engagement well before statutory approvals;
- Clear communication about benefits, risks, and long-term impacts;
- Respect for regional and First Nations values; and
- Processes that allow community feedback to influence project design and mitigation.

Engagement perceived as compliance-driven undermines trust and increases project risk. National policy frameworks and funding programs can encourage consistent, high-quality engagement across the sector.

Community Contribution and Regional Economic Outcomes

Economic outcomes are strongest where host communities experience tangible and enduring benefits from critical minerals projects. Commonwealth policy can support this by aligning project development with both local and broader regional development, workforce, and infrastructure priorities.

Meaningful contributions may include:

- Investment in regionally significant infrastructure;
- Local employment, training, and skills development;
- Support for regional supply chains and value-adding industries; and
- Measures to manage housing pressure and service demand in growth regions.
- Development of appropriate life span contribution agreements for recognised community projects and benefits

Such contributions are most effective when transparent, structured, and aligned with long-term local and regional needs.

Conclusion

Australia's ability to realise the full economic potential of critical minerals depends on strong social licence. Early and meaningful community engagement, appropriate and ongoing contributions to host communities, and clear governance expectations are essential to achieving positive economic and regional outcomes. Embedding these principles into Commonwealth policy and strategic frameworks will reduce project risk, strengthen community confidence, and support the sustainable growth of Australia's critical minerals sector.

Yours faithfully

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Stephen Dunshea.

Stephen Dunshea
GENERAL MANAGER (Interim)