

10 April 2017

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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Dear Committee Secretary,

The Australia Institute welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into *Rehabilitation of mining and resources projects as it relates to Commonwealth responsibilities*. We have written many reports regarding aspects of the mining industry and environmental management and I attach our latest report on this topic, *Dark side of the boom: What we do and don't know about mines, closures and rehabilitation in Australia*.



The key finding of the report is that as the mining boom ends and the mine rehabilitation boom begins, government agencies are not collecting or publishing adequate data on mine site rehabilitation. Seemingly simple questions are very difficult to answer. Most state government agencies do not publish simple data on how many mines are operating in their state. Information on how many mines have been abandoned, how many are being closed, how many have suspended operations is hard to obtain.

Most states' mining departments do not publish detailed estimates of how many mines are operating in the state. Australia has somewhere between 460 and 2,944 mines currently operating according to government estimates. Little data is published on mines in care and maintenance. Official estimates aggregate to between 206 and 972 mines in care and maintenance across Australia. Still less information is available on mines undergoing final closure. Data from Tasmania and examples from other states sum to 8 mines that have begun final closure in the last ten years.

Mine closure, rehabilitation and relinquishment of mine sites is almost unknown in Australia. Examples are the New Wallsend coal mine in NSW and a sand quarry near Melbourne. Tasmanian data lists just one in the last ten years and five over the last thirty years, although the rehabilitation standard of the earlier sites is unclear. There are no examples of major, open cut mines completing rehabilitation to the point where the site can be relinquished.

The stakes are high in Australia's mining clean up boom. The Australian public stands to incur billions of dollars in rehabilitation costs through either use of taxpayer funds or a degraded environment if rehabilitation is not well managed and regulated. We would be happy to provide further comment to the inquiry if necessary.

Best regards,

Rod Campbell
Research Director
The Australia Institute

