



AUSTRALIAN MINING CITIES ALLIANCE



Australian Mining Cities Alliance tackles a range of shared challenges and opportunities faced by communities of mining cities across Australia, and advocates for their sustainable social and economic development.



15th January 2026

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries Inquiry into Australia's Domestic Critical Minerals Capability

On behalf of the Australian Mining Cities Alliance (AMCA), I make this submission for your consideration.

AMCA is an active, formal collaboration (with expanding membership) comprising the Councils of five of Australia's most iconic and economically significant mining cities and regions.

- City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder (WA),
- Mt Isa City Council (Qld),
- Broken Hill City Council (NSW),
- Isaac Regional Council (Qld), and
- City of Karratha (WA).
- Shire of East Pilbara (WA)

Communities of mining cities across Australia face a range of shared challenges and opportunities. The Australian Mining Cities Alliance (AMCA) exists to consider and address issues and to progress the economic development and socio-economic sustainability of mining cities across Australia.

The Australian Mining Cities Alliance (AMCA) urges the Committee to include **iron ore, magnetite, and steel-making coal** on Australia's Critical Minerals List.

These materials are the backbone of global infrastructure and steel production and play an essential role in achieving energy transition and economic resilience. This submission presents a fact-based, regionally informed case to support a broader understanding of criticality that reflects Australia's strategic strengths, export capabilities, and the real infrastructure needs of the 21st century.

1. Relevance to the Inquiry

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries is examining how to strengthen Australia's domestic critical minerals capability. This includes considerations such as:

- Defining what constitutes a "critical mineral" in light of current and future strategic demand,
- Enhancing sovereign capability and supply chain security,
- Expanding downstream processing and value-adding within Australia, and
- Supporting regional development through critical minerals industry growth.

The Australian Mining Cities Alliance (AMCA) believes that iron ore, magnetite, and steel-making coal squarely meet the intent and strategic considerations outlined in this inquiry.

These minerals:

- Are essential inputs into global and domestic steel production, which is the bedrock for infrastructure, energy, transport, housing, and defence.
- Support the industrial capabilities required for net-zero targets, including wind energy, electric transport, and hydrogen infrastructure.
- Are already experiencing rising demand and international competition, especially from nations undergoing rapid industrial development (such as India, Vietnam, and Indonesia).
- Present a strategic opportunity to grow regional economies, enhance sovereign processing capacity, and develop value-adding industries.

While traditional "critical minerals" like lithium and rare earths rightly receive attention for their role in clean energy technology, the underlying materials required to build, transport, install, and operate those technologies are often overlooked. Without steel and, therefore, iron ore, magnetite, and metallurgical coal, many "new economy" solutions would stall.

We submit that a broadened understanding of criticality is urgently needed to ensure national resilience, including the recognition of foundation materials like these.

The Case for Inclusion of Iron Ore, Magnetite, and Steel-Making Coal

1. Strategic Role in Steelmaking and National Infrastructure

Steel is the backbone of industrialised economies, and iron ore, magnetite and metallurgical (steelmaking) coal are irreplaceable in its current production processes. Despite innovations in low-emissions technologies, over 70% of global steel is still produced using blast furnace-basic oxygen furnace (BF-BOF) technology, which requires both iron ore and coking coal¹.

Key facts:

- The World Steel Association reported 1.885 billion tonnes of crude steel produced globally in 2022².
- China, India, Japan, and South Korea, all major importers of Australian iron ore and coal, accounted for over 70% of that production.
- Global demand for steel is projected to rise by 2.3% annually, with India, ASEAN, and Africa driving infrastructure growth³.

- Infrastructure projects from transport networks to renewable energy installations—depend on high-strength, scalable steel, which is currently only achievable with traditional feedstocks.

2. Australia’s Resource Base and Global Market Position

Australia is a world leader in the production and exports of these minerals:

- Iron ore: Australia holds 17% of global reserves and is the largest exporter, producing 880 million tonnes in 2022–23⁴.
- Magnetite: Though less dominant than hematite, magnetite is gaining attention due to its superior processing efficiency, and projects like Magnetite Mines (SA) and Sino Iron (WA) reflect growing investment interest.
- Steel-making coal: Australia is the top exporter, responsible for 53% of global metallurgical coal trade in 2022⁵.

This dominant position strengthens Australia’s sovereign capability and trade leverage, particularly with strategic partners.

3. The Need for Enabling Infrastructure

Unlocking the value of Australia’s critical minerals also depends on the development and coordination of essential enabling infrastructure, which includes:

- Freight transport infrastructure – Roads and rail corridors to connect mines with ports, refineries and industrial hubs.
- Reliable water supply – including pipelines and desalination for processing operations.
- Energy infrastructure – Secure, lower-emissions energy systems to support industrial-scale value-adding.

The Australian Government’s Critical Minerals Strategy 2023–2030¹⁰ explicitly identifies enabling infrastructure as a key strategic focus area. Industry examples also highlight the practical risks of infrastructure underdevelopment, such as power reliability issues disrupting mineral processing in Western Australia⁹. Therefore, aligning infrastructure investment with critical minerals priorities is essential for effective supply chain development, export capacity, and sovereign capability.

4. International Precedents for Recognition

- The European Union’s 2023 Critical Raw Materials Act includes coking coal on its Critical Raw Materials List⁷, citing its:
 - Importance to industrial production,
 - Strategic role in the transition to a low-carbon economy,
 - Limited global supply, and
 - Vulnerability to geopolitical risks.

Other jurisdictions (e.g., Canada, South Korea) are currently reviewing their own critical minerals lists and policies, with growing recognition that traditional materials such as coking coal remain essential during the transition to net-zero.

5. Exposure to Global Supply Chain Risk

Australian iron ore and coal exports are concentrated among a few major buyers:

- Over 80% of Australian iron ore exports go to China, creating a strategic exposure risk⁶.
- Tensions in the Australia/ China relationship have already affected coal shipments, underlining the fragility of market access in politically volatile environments.
- Geopolitical risk, resource nationalism, climate-related disruptions, and global logistics instability further underscore the need for resilient, diversified supply strategies, which are central themes of the Australian Government's Critical Minerals Strategy 2023–2030¹⁰.

6. Essential Role in Energy Transition and Decarbonisation

While not traditionally associated with the energy transition, these materials are foundational to low-emissions infrastructure:

- Wind turbines use approximately 120–180 tonnes of steel per MW⁸.
- Electric vehicles, rail, and transmission infrastructure all rely on high-grade steel components.
- The shift to green hydrogen and ammonia will also require extensive steel-based infrastructure.

Therefore, including steel feedstocks on the Critical Minerals List would acknowledge their indirect yet essential role in enabling Australia's net-zero ambitions.

7. Support for Regional Economies and Workforce Transition

Australia's mining cities and regional communities are deeply reliant on the continued viability of iron ore, magnetite, and coal exports. Recognising these minerals as critical would:

- Signal long-term confidence to investors in resource regions,
- Support job retention and skills development in mining towns,
- Encourage domestic processing investment to align with the government's Future Made in Australia strategy.

Further, communities represented by AMCA, such as Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Mt Isa, and Karratha, are ideally placed to anchor regional value chains that can de-risk national supply needs and reduce dependence on imports.

Why This Matters to Mining Cities

The AMCA represents six of Australia's key mining cities and towns, each contributing significantly to national GDP, exports, and energy security.

Recognising these minerals as critical will:

1. Secure Jobs and Investment

Mining communities experience the direct effects of commodity cycles. Recognition promotes certainty for employers, employees and investors in long-term planning.

2. Support Regional Value-Adding

Listing these minerals can unlock policy and funding mechanisms for:

- Domestic processing,
- Infrastructure development,
- Renewable energy deployment in mining zones.

3. Address Policy Inequities

Current discourse skews heavily towards “new” minerals. Traditional but essential inputs must not be overlooked in the national planning framework.

4. Enable a Just Transition

Regional cities want a seat at the table in the net-zero economy. These communities are equipped to lead innovation but need clear signals that their industries remain valued and relevant.

Mining cities are not remnants of the past. They are key actors in building the future.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The Australian Mining Cities Alliance urges the Committee to:

- Expand the Critical Minerals List to include iron ore, magnetite, and steel-making coal, in recognition of their strategic, economic, and supply-chain value.
- Adopt a broader and more infrastructure-aware definition of criticality that accounts for essential inputs into low-carbon systems and sovereign capability.
- Promote downstream processing and advanced manufacturing of these materials in regional Australia, ensuring maximum economic and employment return.
- Formally engage mining cities and regional councils as trusted partners in the development of Australia’s critical minerals future.

We commend the Committee for its leadership on this vital matter and reaffirm our commitment to working together to ensure Australia’s resources policy reflects both innovation and reality.

Organisation: Australian Mining Cities Alliance (AMCA)

Contact Name: Gavin Cator

Position: Executive Officer

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Website: www.amca.org.au

Attachment:

- *Position Paper: Inclusion of Iron Ore, Magnetite and Steel-Making Coal in Australia’s Critical Minerals List (AMCA, Feb 2025)*

References:

1. International Energy Agency (IEA). (2020). *Iron and Steel Technology Roadmap: Towards more sustainable steelmaking*. OECD/IEA. pp. 12, 19–24, 52. <https://www.iea.org/reports/iron-and-steel-technology-roadmap>
2. World Steel Association. (2023). *World Steel in Figures 2023*. pp. 3, 5, 9. <https://worldsteel.org>
3. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2023). *Steel Market Developments – Q4 2023*. pp. 5–7, 10. <https://www.oecd.org/industry/ind/steel.htm>
4. Geoscience Australia. (2023). *Australia's Identified Mineral Resources 2023*. pp. 28, 31, 45. <https://www.ga.gov.au>
5. Department of Industry, Science and Resources. (2023). *Resources and Energy Quarterly – December 2023*. pp. 12, 16, 41. <https://www.industry.gov.au>
6. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2023). *International Trade in Goods and Services, Australia*. [dynamic dataset]. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics>
7. European Commission. (2023). *COM(2023)160 final: Proposal for a Regulation... Critical Raw Materials Act (Annex)*. pp. 1, 4, 6–7. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52023PC0160>
8. International Energy Agency (IEA). (2021). *The Role of Critical Minerals in Clean Energy Transitions*. pp. 13, 23, 107. <https://www.iea.org/reports/the-role-of-critical-minerals-in-clean-energy-transitions>
9. The Australian. (2024). WA fails to deliver on the promise of a reliable and greener power supply to the \$800 m Lynas processing plant. <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/wa-fails-to-deliver-on-promise-of-reliable-and-greener-power-supply-to-800m-lynas-processing-plant/news-story/59d4857c23060419e9bb799428feac76>
10. **Department of Industry, Science and Resources.** (2023). *Critical Minerals Strategy 2023–2030*. Australian Government. pp. 1–36. <https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/critical-minerals-strategy-2023-2030>