

Comments on Draft Western Australia Sustainability Strategy

*Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, University of Queensland
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In general terms, we are impressed by the comprehensiveness of the draft strategy and the amount of thought that has gone into preparing it. The work that has been done has positioned Western Australia as a pacesetter in this area.

Our only specific comments are as follows:

Action 3.27:

With key stakeholders, develop a set of agreed Sustainability Operating Principles for the Mining Sector, including consideration of the MMSD Principles recently outlined through the GMI, through a working group managed through the Dept of Minerals and Petroleum Resources.

Comment

There is a possibility that the proposed working group could duplicate work already underway within the minerals industry. The International Council of Mines and Metals (ICMM) is working towards producing a set of operating principles for the global mineral industry. In parallel, the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA), which represents all of the major players in the industry, has its own member committee working towards the same goal. Our understanding is that the MCA is about to commence work in earnest on broadening the current Australian Mineral Industry Code for Environmental Management to reflect more fully sustainability issues. The minerals industry is likely to be reluctant to be involved in 'yet another process' to define operating principles that cuts across the MCA exercise. It is also important to avoid the emergence of competing frameworks in different jurisdictions which might only further confuse stakeholders.

Subject to confirmation from the MCA on its timetable, a more appropriate course of action might be to let the MCA process run its course and for the WA Government to seek to have input into the development of the proposed new Code. Once this Code has been finalised, consideration could then be given to whether it needs to be supplemented or modified to fit WA circumstances. (One issue here is that the junior exploration and mining sector is unlikely to have much involvement in the MCA process and so may not consider itself to have ownership of the outcomes.)

Action 3.30

Work with industry on the development of voluntary accreditation for sustainability

Comment

Again, it would make sense to liaise with the MCA on this, as the proposed Code should provide a framework for accreditation in some form.

The more challenging issue, which is not really addressed in the strategy, is what to do with those companies – such as the junior miners – who are reluctant to participate in voluntary schemes. This may require some form of regulatory ‘floor’ to ensure that all companies meet at least minimum standards. The regulatory framework should also recognise, and reward in some way, those companies that are prepared to undertake voluntary accreditation.

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