

# Fingerboards Critical Minerals Project Community Reference Group (CRG) 13 June 2025 Meeting Notes

**Meeting Date:** Friday, 13 June 2025

**Meeting Time:** 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM

**Meeting Location:** Lindenow South Football Netball Club

**Independent Chair:** John Mitchell

**GCM Project Team Attendees:** Michelle Wood, Stefan Wolmarans, Ryan Leslie, Murray Holland, Loretta Fallaw, Paul Edwards

**CRG Member Attendees:** John Alexander, Alfred Chown, Tess Coverdale, Trevor Hancock, Joshua Nelson, David Radford, Vesna Rendulic, Lionel Rose, Jillian Stewart, Cr Geoff Wells (Wellington Shire)

**CRG Member Apologies:** Andrew Sheridan, Simon Padfield.

**Observers:** David Roberts (Regional Development Gippsland), Glenn Weston (Public Place)

## Attachments:

- Master CRG Presentation\_13 June
- CRG MW Notes 13 June 2025

## Meeting Summary

The second CRG meeting for the Fingerboards Project focused on revised mine plans, governance, community engagement, and benefit sharing. GCM committed to appointing three environmental experts to the CRG and strengthening landholder communications. Key concerns included dust, noise, and outreach to nearby residents. The group discussed the 2026 rehabilitation trial and the ongoing community roadshow to gather feedback. Members reviewed GCM's draft Benefit Sharing Framework, recommending clearer definitions of "local," more strategic long-term investments, and an independent body to manage funds - indicating the current grants model risks being seen as "social license buying". Sub-groups and continued dialogue are planned for the next meeting in August.

## 1. Welcome, Introductions, and Membership

The meeting commenced at 1:00 PM with a welcome & Acknowledgement of Country from John Mitchell, CRG Chair. John acknowledged the Gunaikurnai People as the Traditional Custodians of the land encompassing the proposed Fingerboards Project area and paid respects to their Elders past and present.

A strong emphasis was placed on transparency, especially potential conflicts of interest. Membership composition was discussed, particularly the need for broader environmental expertise and new applications.

The meeting notes from Meeting #1 were accepted.

Key Discussion Points:

- John Alexander (JA) disclosed a potential conflict of interest regarding future purchase and/or leasing of land. JA offered to resign or sit out of particular discussions if the Chair and members felt this was necessary. CRG members did not find an issue with this disclosure. John Mitchell affirmed transparency standards and that conflicts should be declared at each meeting.
- Ryan Leslie stated that the CRG currently has 12 members, with the recent resignation of Peter Robinson due to his relocating to South Australia.
- Ryan stated that GCM would like an additional 3 members who have an environmental focus as advocated by Andrew Sheridan during and post CRG Meeting #1.
- GCM would like current members to work with the Chair to appoint the remaining 3 members. GCM will organise advertisements and facilitate applications via the website. The Chair will work with the following volunteering members to review applications and table recommendations to GCM:
  - Trevor Hancock
  - David Radford
  - Lionel Rose
  - Jill Stewart
- CRG applications close on Friday, 11 July. Recommendations and approvals must take place by Friday, 18 July coordinated by the Chair.
- Ryan outlined that GCM will invite East Gippsland Shire Council representatives to be observers at all CRG meetings.

- Clarification was sought on how confidentiality is to be managed. GCM outlined that confidential and commercially sensitive information may be shared with CRG members, which may affect individuals or parties.

Members are, however, encouraged to discuss issues and share information with the wider community unless such matters are noted as strictly confidential. An example being the details of CRG member applicants.

#### Key Actions / Next Steps:

- CGM to promote CRG membership through upcoming community drop-ins, social media, and the GCM website.
- CRG members are encouraged to promote applications from their networks.
- Chair to work with the abovementioned volunteers to review applications and make recommendations to GCM. Confidentiality of applicants is paramount.
- GCM to maintain open observer status for council and agency representatives.

## 2. Project Progress & Key Developments

### Presenter: Michelle Wood (CEO)

Michelle outlined the revised project scope and reduction in mining area, its alignment with national strategic goals, and recent government approvals of major projects, as well as recent public sentiment survey results.

The revised mine area was presented, including key aspects of the [new map](#). Baseline monitoring and ongoing environmental and technical studies were also outlined.

Emerging opportunities include the potential development of a dedicated rail siding for freight logistics, jobs and education mapping across the region, and the project's role in strengthening national security through onshore critical minerals processing.

Key challenges identified include aligning with net-zero targets and securing long-term water certainty.

### Key Discussion Points:

- Landholder outreach was criticised by some members for being delayed and inconsistent. One member highlighted that not every local resident or neighbour has access to technology and requires face-to-face interaction.

- CRG members recounted neighbours receiving late or no notification of the Dept. of Health installing radon monitors on public roads. GCM explained that the Dept. of Health makes its own decision on monitoring locations and installations; however GCM will endeavour to understand and communicate the activities of independent agencies.
- GCM stated that mine design concepts and, in particular, the mine boundary and infrastructure alignments have evolved through the initial design process along with recent receptor mapping. The emphasis is to provide information to landholders and near neighbours with certainty and confidence as soon as possible. John Alexander stated that, even if such parameters aren't fully determined, providing an outline of the process and timelines is important.
- Lionel Rose highlighted that ERR must resolve and publish an updated RL2026 map to highlight that RL2023 is covered by Section 7 exemption. ERR gave Ryan Leslie the undertaking that it would update the map as soon as possible back in April 2025.

Key Actions / Next Steps:

- Now that the proposed mine and infrastructure boundaries and alignments are defined and the receptor mapping is nearing completion, GCM will increase work to reach out to landowners and near neighbours with these details to discuss potential impacts and the proposed schedule of monitoring and technical studies. The engagement strategy will consider communication channels and interaction methods, including face-to-face opportunities as advised by a CRG sub-group.
- Ryan to follow up with ERR as to where they're at with RL2026 map update.

### 3. Mine Design Update

**Presenter: Stefan Wolmarans (Project Director – Technical)**

Stefan presented an overview of the mine design process to determine the overall mining footprint in consideration of environmental constraints and conservation goals, offset requirements, physical/geological constraints, and economics. Stefan emphasised that mining occurs in strips to enable progressive rehabilitation in areas much smaller than the total mining footprint, and work is underway to define typical strip/void dimensions and mine sequencing.

Design starts from the finished landform to identify material movement during the detailed design due to the natural swell of the material. Rehandle must be minimised to ensure rapid rehabilitation and maintain drainage paths and catchments after completion of mining.

Final landform designs were presented along with details of the next steps in design, namely:

- Defining the sequence of mining - how do we move through the mining areas and undertake the detailed mine designs – strip sequence, tailings deposition sequence and rehabilitation sequence.

This work is currently in progress.

- Ongoing test against noise and dust modelling to identify areas of refinement.

Lastly, the Mineral Sands Process Sequence was presented to highlight that the Fingerboards Project is a mining and separation exercise. No chemicals are used in separation, only water and gravity.

Key Discussion Points:

- With the mine's southern extension, the separation plant has moved closer to some properties to the south, and the smaller mine footprint has reduced proximity to northern properties, which will be reflected in the receptor mapping. Stefan noted that the separation plant generates less noise than mining equipment and can be effectively shielded.
- Despite changes to reduce and mitigate dust concerns were raised regarding:
  - Substantial gullies existing in the HVP plantation and the potential of drainage overload during East Coast Low weather conditions.
  - Silicon dust risk from overburden material.
  - Impacts of dust on water tanks and drinking water.
- Stefan stated that these concerns, risks, and impacts are being assessed via monitoring, modelling, design, and test pit trials.
- CRG members requested more detail on studies including data and results as they progress.

Key Actions / Next Steps:

- GCM to:
  - Continue refining tailings sequencing and landform stability planning.
  - Publish the updated mine sequencing schedule when finalised.
  - Incorporate noise and dust modelling results into targeted landholder engagement.
  - Complete and share the receptor map showing expected impacts.
  - Provide more detail on environmental and technical studies.

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## 4. Mine Rehabilitation & Demonstration Pit

**Presenter: Loretta Fallaw (Project Lead – Environmental)**

Loretta Fallaw presented the MRDP as a controlled, small-scale trial for key aspects of rehabilitation. It will allow testing of backfill, tailings handling, and re-vegetation prior to full-scale operations.

Key Discussion Points:

- MRDP scheduled for early 2026; located on freehold land, away from sensitive zones, and undertaken during the dustiest conditions.
- Activities include topsoil preservation, ore recovery, tailings backfill, and pasture trials.
- Environmental monitoring (soil, air, water, noise) to inform full-scale mine planning.
- Rehabilitation trials will meet multiple RL2026 milestones and underpin feasibility design.
- The pit wall angle of repose has been designed in accordance with Australian Standards in consideration of the dispersive soils.

Key Actions / Next Steps:

- GCM to:
  - Submit work plan for MRDP rehabilitation trials to government (Loretta).
  - Ensure adjacent landowners are briefed prior to works commencing.
  - Share data on noise, air, and water monitoring as it becomes available.
  - Trial and document the effectiveness of pasture restoration.

## 5. Community & Stakeholder Engagement

**Presenter: Ryan Leslie (Project Director – Community & Stakeholder Engagement)**

Ryan presented a broad overview of interest, concerns, and opportunities based on feedback to date, along with details of the engagement roadmap (refer to presentation slides).

GCM is conducting a June-July 'Listen & Learn' roadshow by hosting four drop-in sessions to allow for one-on-one conversations where people can engage on their own terms, at their own pace, and ask the questions that matter most to them:

- Saturday, 14 June – The Hub Bairnsdale, 27 Dalmahoy St, Bairnsdale 9:00am to noon
- Saturday, 21 June – Lindenow General Store, 149 Main Rd, Lindenow from 9:00am to noon
- Saturday, 28 June – Port of Sale Function Gathering Area, 154 Princess Hwy Service Rd, Sale from 10.30am to 2.00pm
- Saturday, 5 July – Segue Community Hub & Arts Café, 166 Tyers St, Stratford from 10.00am to 2.00pm

These sessions are designed to inform local communities, answer questions, and gather feedback.

### **Benefit Sharing**

Ryan provided an overview of GCM's benefit sharing framework and invited CRG members to provide constructive feedback on policies and priorities. GCM committed to sharing the draft Benefit Sharing Plan with CRG members for feedback and collaborative input into its design.

The four focus areas presented were:

- Focus Area 1 – Cultural Heritage and First Nations Empowerment
- Focus Area 2 – Local Employment, Procurement, and Workforce Development
- Focus Area 3 – Investment in Local Infrastructure and Legacy Assets
- Focus Area 4 – Community Strengthening & Livability

The CRG offered detailed and constructive feedback on benefit-sharing priorities as follows:

- The current Community Grants Program (part of Focus Area 4):
  - Some members expressed concern that the existing grants program may be perceived as "buying social licence" rather than supporting priority needs.
  - Options presented for improvement:
    - Cease the program altogether.

- Tighten the scope by prioritising social and legacy-focused causes or assets or narrowing eligibility to townships and rural communities most directly impacted.
- Strategic and Legacy Investment:
  - A general recommendation was made to provide more substantial support to fewer recipients that align with community values and deliver lasting benefits.
  - Positive examples discussed:
    - Clontarf Foundation and Girls at the Centre: longer-term partnership.
    - Gippsland Sheep Breeders Association – Merino Wool Trials: potential to support via land and shed lease at minimal cost.
    - Landmark community investment: Trevor Hancock suggested a major cultural facility similar to the John Leslie Performing Arts Centre in Sale, noting such an initiative would require Mining Licence approval.

East Gippsland Shire Council and GLaWAC are seeking \$300,000 in State Government funding for a feasibility study into a Keeping Place and Art Gallery at Howitt Park, Bairnsdale.

- Local Procurement & Employment
  - Strong endorsement of a local jobs and supply chain strategy.
  - Noted that both East Gippsland and Wellington Shires fall within the project's workforce and supplier catchment.
  - Members recommended:
    - Formal documentation of procurement terms and policies
    - Development of a Workforce Development Plan with TAFE Gippsland and Federation University.
    - Inclusion of a Workforce Transition Plan post-mine closure.
- Defining "Local"
  - Suggestions were made for a tiered definition of locality to inform benefit eligibility and policy design:
    - 5-km zone

- Radius capturing local townships and community infrastructure
- East Gippsland and Wellington Shires – for workforce and economic inclusion.
- Governance of Benefit Sharing
  - Members agreed that the CRG should not be the decision-making body for community benefit recipients.
  - Broad support was given to establishing a separate governance group with community representation to oversee a Community Benefit Fund.

Key Actions / Next Steps:

- GCM to:
  - Share the draft Benefit Sharing Plan with CRG members for feedback and collaborative input into its design.
  - Provide feedback on drop-in sessions and increase communication between meetings, including project updates/news.
  - Provide opportunities for CRG members to provide a list of questions in advance and help set the agenda
  - GCM CEO proposed the formation of four sub-groups on:
    - Water
    - Legacy planning
    - Communications
    - Environmental and Technical

## 6. Meeting Close & Next Steps

John Mitchell thanked members for their contributions. Michelle encouraged further feedback between meetings and reaffirmed GCM's commitment to open communication.

The Chair will provide an opportunity for members to provide a list of questions in advance of the next meeting and schedule 30 minutes for General Business.

CRG members are to work with the Chair to consider the formation of sub-groups that may add value to the CRG. Michelle suggested:

- Water
- Legacy planning
- Communications
- Environmental and technical

Remaining 2025 Meetings:

- Meeting #3 – Friday, 8 Aug 2025
- Meeting #4 – Friday, 17 October 2025
- Meeting #5 – Friday, 12 December 2025

**Meeting concluded at: 5:00 PM**