

Fingerboards Critical Minerals Project Community Reference Group (CRG) 8 August 2025 Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: Friday, 8 Aug 2025

Meeting Time: 1:00 PM to 4:20 PM

Meeting Location: Lindenow South Football Netball Club

Independent Chair: John Mitchell

GCM Project Team Attendees: Michelle Wood*, Stefan Wolmarans*, Ryan Leslie, Janet Robertson, Murray Holland, Bryan Chadwick (AECOM)

CRG Member Attendees: Andrew Sheridan, Carolyn Cameron, David Radford (East Gippsland Water), Graham Watt, Jillian Stewart*, John Alexander, Joshua Nelson, Lionel Rose, Peter Reefman, Rohan Reynolds, Tess Coverdale, Trevor Hancock, Vesna Rendulic, Cr Geoff Wells (Wellington Shire).

CRG Member Apologies: Alfred Chown, Simon Padfield

Observers: None

Attachments: Master CRG Meeting_3 Presentation_08Aug2025

Meeting Summary

The meeting introduced new members and supported observer roles for ERR and RDV. GCM outlined the revised mining area, early-stage mine design focused on rehabilitation-first planning, environmental objectives, receptor mapping and impact assessments. Updates included the EES self-referral process (due Dec 2025), demonstration pit planning, and water supply investigations. Community engagement actions included pausing grants to refocus funds locally, enhancing landholder outreach, and considering extending engagement channels including community meetings.

1. Welcome, Introductions, and Membership

The meeting commenced at 1:00 PM with a welcome from John Mitchell, CRG Chair. Members gave a brief personal introductions. Bryan Chadwick, who attended Meeting #1, is Technical Director of AECOM, was introduced as leading the environmental and technical studies and was on hand to answer questions.

The notes from Meeting #2 were approved.

Key Discussion Points:

- Tess Coverdale disclosed a potential conflict of interest regarding an expression of interest in leasing GCM-owned land, which had recently gone out to tender. CRG members did not find issue with this.
- Following a process run by Chair John Mitchell and the CRG membership sub-group, new members Carolyn Cameron, Graham Watt, Peter Reefman, and Rohan Reynolds were introduced. The East Gippsland Ratepayers & Residents Association (EGRRA) has been being offered membership on the basis of a fully constituted meeting putting a delegate forward.
- Members were invited to have photographs taken of themselves to put up on GCM's website under a Community Reference Group section on agreed terms (contact information) to make it easy for community members to make contact with them. The following members volunteered their photographs: Carolyn Cameron, David Radford (East Gippsland Water), Graham Watt, Jillian Stewart, Joshua Nelson, Peter Reefman, Rohan Reynolds, Tess Coverdale, Trevor Hancock, Vesna Rendulic, Cr Geoff Wells (Wellington Shire).
- Earth Resources Regulator (ERR) asked if they could have representation from their stakeholder engagement team at the CRG as an observer at the next meeting and possibly all future meetings. David Roberts of Regional Development Victoria (RDV), who observed Meeting #2, has also expressed interest in being an ongoing observer. Members were in support of this.
- Andrew Sheridan expressed interest in hearing directly from ERR on the significance of the deposit and the regulatory approval process.

Ryan outlined that GCM has invited East Gippsland Shire Council to nominate representatives to be observers to CRG meetings, but no person(s) has been put forward. CRG members expressed strong and renewed interest in a shire representative.

Key Actions / Next Steps:

- GCM to notify ERR and RDV of the CRG's approval for them to provide an observer.
- GCM to ask ERR if they are willing to present the significance of the deposit and approvals process to the CRG.
- CRG members are encouraged to contact East Gippsland Shire to request a representative attend CRG meetings as an observer.

2. Project Progress & Approvals

Presenter: Michelle Wood (CEO)

Michelle spoke to the latest [map](#) outlining the revised scope and reduction in mining area, emphasising that mining would be carried out in blocks and strips, not the whole purple area at once.

GCM has commenced baseline monitoring and beginning the process of assessing the impact of the mining area and methodology.

The Environmental Assessment and Approvals Process was outlined highlighting that GCM is at the beginning of the process. GCM is seeking community feedback prior to the formal consultation process to shape a better project to incorporate community interests.

Michelle highlighted that GCM must meet milestones set by Earth Resources Regulator (ERR) in accordance with its retention license. One of which is that GCM must submit an EES self-referral by December 2025. The self-referral outlines the project proposal, mine life, mining area, and mining sequence. The Government then assesses whether or not it is a new project and whether it's been substantially re-scoped to go through another full Environmental Effects Statement (EES). This assessment will likely take place from December 2025 through to February 2026. If it is determined that a full EES is required, then this will be an 18 month process.

The scope of the project, impacts, and studies are exhibited for public submission and the public provides feedback, which GCM expects could be around April 2026. Then the studies continue and are finalised and the report is submitted for public exhibition for review and feedback. The Minister then makes an assessment, which will be in 2027 at the earliest.

The baseline monitoring and studies being undertaken by GCM are in preparation for a full EES. The demonstration pit is planned for early 2026 and forms part of the impact assessments and studies and will occur as planned in the referral and assessment period. The demonstration pit sits under a separate work plan.

Key Discussion Points:

- Considerable interest and discussion on GCM ownership and shareholding.

Key Actions / Next Steps:

- GCM to produce and circulate a paper on the ownership of GCM and ask an Appian representative to attend the next CRG meeting.

3. Mine Design Update

Presenter: Stefan Wolmarans (Project Director – Technical)

Stefan presented early stages of the design process, emphasising that the designs are preliminary and subject to change based on impact assessments. The work is centred on designing the final landform by starting with the intended rehabilitation surface and planning mining activities to achieve it.

Key Environmental Design Objectives:

- Limit exposed areas at any one time to under 15% of the project area.
- Reduce material rehandling so rehabilitation can begin earlier.
- Minimise haul distances and volumes.
- Manage surface water effectively.

The initial design will form the basis for dust, noise, and water impact assessments, and will be refined through an iterative process.

Details of the mining area that can be potentially mined including stockpile areas (the purple areas) were presented containing two main pits and satellite pits. Infrastructure including power lines, water pipelines, bore field pipelines, water catchment dams, and roads are peripheral to the mining area.

Panels are broken down into blocks and strips. The design is aiming for a maximum of 150 hectares of exposed area at any one time including the voids, backfilled sections not yet vegetated, re-vegetated sections not yet established, and open stockpiles.

The initial rehabilitation response will be to seed fast-growing pasture to get ground cover, help prevent erosion and stabilise the ground. Following this, second phase rehabilitation may involve plantations or natural grasslands.

Preliminary mine sequence annual snapshots were presented along a timeline.

The demonstration pit will also provide an opportunity to validate rehabilitation. Earthworks will run from January to April (backfill to the final level), then will start with revegetation trials.

Photos of comparable mobile mining units and a wet concentrator plant were presented.

GCM has drafted a Receptor Map, detailing sensitive receptors within a 2km and 5km radius

from the project area. Receptors include dwellings, operational or industrial facilities, schools, places of congregation, parks or reserves, and waterways. This is a normal part of mine design under regulations. The Receptor Map forms the spatial basis for assessing potential impacts such as dust, noise, and visual changes.

Key Discussion Points:

- Bryan stressed the importance of consistency in terminology and acronyms when discussing different aspects of the project, such as active areas, mining blocks, stockpiles, and haul roads.
- Requests were made to:
 - Provide a glossary of key terminology.
 - Provide more detail on the mining sequence to include mining, backfilling, re-vegetation, percentage of groundcover.
 - Provide more detail on the stages and percentages of open, back-filled, and rehabilitated areas including ground cover.
- Waterways that are to be excavated will be temporarily diverted in rock-lined open channels under strict design criterion that must manage the same volume of water. Water flow and water quality testing will be carried out to inform the impact assessments. Lionel Rose stated that the chain of ponds is an extremely valuable environmental asset in the area and can't be damaged.
- Questions were asked whether the test pit is representative of the deepest mining sections (48m to ore) and if it helps to understand mining characteristics during extreme weather conditions. Questions were also asked about how rehabilitation will be managed over varying seasons.
- Stefan explained that the test pit will provide specific tailing information on how the material consolidates and obtain specific engineering parameters on material behaviour that can be applied to varying depths. Rehabilitation will occur over a longer period of time to cover different seasons.
- The demonstration pit falls under a separate work plan under ERR as the lead agency, which will involve EPA, CMA, cultural heritage studies etc. GCM is in the process of seeking approval for the demonstration pit.
- The mine schedule makes allowance for unplanned weather events, plant shutdowns, maintenance etc. 7000 processing hours per year are planned.
- A question was asked about wear and tear and failures of poly-piping. Stefan explained that pressures are fairly low, pipes get rotated when shifted around, and pressure is measured at the inlet and outlet of pumps, which will trip in the event of a pipe failure. Plastic wear particles get screened at the wet concentrator plant.
- More information was requested on tailings management.
- GCM is in the process of exploring water supply options for the project, including surface water and groundwater. These sources will be evaluated to determine the most sustainable and reliable options for meeting the project's water needs and will be subject to impact assessments. The water allocation process involves securing water rights through multiple transactions. This process ensures that the project has access to the necessary water resources while complying with regulatory

requirements. John Alexander stated that there are competing interests from irrigators with fully allocated water licenses and adjacent stock and domestic bores will need to form part of the engagement and impact assessment. Concerns were also raised about cutting into shallow gravels on the way to the deeper target bore.

- Receptor Mapping: Carolyn suggested to detail waterways with a thin blue line rather than a dot.
- Peter Reefman asked how a 2 year demonstration pit and rehabilitation program can replicate weather events that occur over 20 year periods and how long term geological stability can be assured.
- Lionel asked how sodic soils will be treated and the quantum of gypsum and lime needed.

Key Actions / Next Steps:

- GCM to provide a glossary of key mining terminology and scope/purpose of 2km and 5km.
- GCM to provide detail of tailings methodology/management and bore field testing program at the next CRG meeting. Suggestions were made to invite a geo-chemist, hydrogeologist, and agronomist to future meetings.
- GCM to distribute an electronic copy of the Receptor Map to CRG members for review and feedback, allowing them to identify any missing or unclear information. GCM to detail waterways with blue lines.
- Ryan to circulate a survey in advance of the next CRG meeting asking for specific questions, such as tailings management.

4. Community & Stakeholder Engagement

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

Some of the key recommendations from the CRG's first two meetings were highlighted, demonstrating GCM's commitment to listening and acting on feedback, including:

- Giving CRG members the floor by providing more time for questions in Meeting #3.
- Increasing CRG membership and empowering existing CRG members to review applications and make recommendations to GCM, which were adopted. The CRG membership now has a more diverse representation with greater environmental and land care knowledge.
- Putting pause to the Community Grants Program in Quarter 4 and committing to work with the CRG on re-shaping and channeling these funds to more local causes (as part of the Benefit Sharing plan).
- Committing to developing a local jobs and procurement policy (as part of the Benefit Sharing plan).
- Developing a more detailed Receptor Map, which is under continual development.
- Ramping up engagement with landholders and near neighbours including a

maildrop to residents within ~5km radius of the project area. The letter will go out on 25th Aug and will invite residents to make contact with GCM with questions.

- Installing a second weather station to capture more accurate wind data for dust and noise modelling.
- Exploring shared water infrastructure with water authorities and irrigators.

GCM has introduced the following engagement channels to build awareness, encourage participation, and gather community feedback:

- Community Reference Group
- One-on-one meetings
- Briefings, presentations, and site tours
- Community drop-in sessions
- Events & field days
- Website + chatbot
- Webinars
- Newsletters including physical distribution via Australia Post and local newspapers and email distribution
- Local media and social media
- Information sheets
- Regular website updates.

GCM is in the process of:

- Distributing letters to local residents within ~5km radius to invite feedback and enquiry, encouraging residents to make contact with GCM.
- Directly engaging with landholders within a 2km radius.
- Establishing a virtual showroom on the GCM website.
- Establishing a local office.

Ryan provided an overview of GCM's benefit sharing framework of which CRG members and other key stakeholders will have opportunity to participate in working groups in Pillars 2-4. Ryan is in the process of determining the scope and terms of reference for these working groups.

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

Key Discussion Points:

- John Alexander: Asked if we were reaching out to people within 5km. Response: Residents within 2km will be approached directly and those within 2-5km are encouraged to contact GCM if interested to do so.
- Tess: Stated it is difficult to meet people throughout the day as most will be at work. Asked if door knocking was worthwhile.
- Carolyn: Asked to clarify if the door knocking would be before or after the letter drop. Response: Generally, after the letter drop.
- Michelle: We're doing it because we did get a lot of feedback at the drop-in sessions that we need to engage more directly with landholders in proximity to the project area.
- Lionel: Wanted some notice prior to the door knock rather than a cold call. Suggested 48 hours. Locals are wary of strangers and theft in the local area.
- Geoff Wells: This shows intent on reaching out to people and is one of the ways GCM are going to do that.
- Carolyn: Kalbar didn't engage with everyone directly within the 2 km radius previously.
- Graham: Suggested an information board on the Fingerboards intersection. Lionel noted that the Fingerboards intersection with the Boards on it is private property (owned by the Stephensons). It's also important to notify people that travel through the area that may be affected by traffic diversions, as an example.
- Josh: Should have some magnetic signage on the side of the vehicles for visibility for landowners when door knocking.
- Andrew: Residents beyond the 5km radius may be affected by dust. Response: The dust modelling will determine this.
- Lionel: Called for a public meeting in the Hall where members of the public can ask questions and raise their concerns. MFG has been asking from day one for town hall meetings.
- Michelle stated that the drop-in sessions constituted public meetings and provided opportunity for local residents and members of the public to access information and provide feedback. GCM has received much feedback that people find public town hall meetings confrontational.
- The following suggestion were offered to make public meetings more effective in managing potential disruption:
 - Pre-registered questions that may help with anonymity
 - Have a clear purpose and a structured meeting format
 - Having strong safety protocol in place
 - Having an independent facilitator/moderator
 - Make the events ticketed

- Highlighted what stage of the project we're at and highlighting that many technical questions can't be answered for some time
- Ask residents within a given radius at local level and in Bairnsdale for a more broad public audience
- Getting the timing right with, preferably, more answers key questions that further design and impact studies will reveal.

Key Actions:

- GCM to organise vehicle signage
- GCM to draft a discussion paper on the for and against, methodology and timing of public forums.

*Jillian retired from the meeting at 3:05pm due to work commitments and Michelle and Stefan retired from the meeting at 4:05pm due to travel requirements.

5. Meeting Close & Next Steps

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

Ryan is to provide opportunity for members to provide a list of questions in advance of the next meeting.

Remaining 2025 Meetings:

- Meeting #4 – Friday 17th October 2025
- Meeting #5 – Friday 12th December 2025

Meeting concluded at: 4:20 PM