Gippsland Critical Minerals

Fingerboards Critical Minerals Project
Study Briefs – Ecology Assessment

Overview

The ecology assessment aims to provide a transparent, science-based evaluation of the Project's potential impacts on terrestrial and aquatic environments, native vegetation, and flora and fauna values within and surrounding the Project area. It will aim to identify and characterise ecological values, including threatened species and ecological communities listed under state and Commonwealth legislation.

This will include assessment of the extent and significance of potential impacts associated with vegetation removal, habitat fragmentation, altered hydrology, and potential indirect effects such as dust, noise, and invasive species spread.

The assessment will draw on field surveys, which will include site walkovers, Vegetation Quality Assessments (VQAs), and fauna surveys that adhere to the relevant accepted survey methodologies and are conducted by suitably qualified ecology professionals.

Field surveys will be complemented by desktop studies, and community and stakeholder engagement to inform mitigation and management measures to protect biodiversity during construction, operation, and closure of the Project.

Assessment Objectives

- Undertake comprehensive field surveys throughout 2025 and 2026 to identify local flora, fauna, and ecological communities on site during appropriate seasonal survey windows.
- Deliver a robust, evidence-based evaluation of ecological impacts, including direct and indirect effects on native vegetation, fauna habitats, and threatened species.
- Assess and avoid, minimise or offset potential adverse effects on native vegetation, habitats, listed threatened species and ecological communities, migratory species, and other protected flora and fauna, including within the more ecologically significant areas of Lucas Creek, Simpson, and Perry Gullies.
- Guide strategies to avoid, minimise, and monitor ecological disturbances, with the aim of supporting meaningful conservation outcomes.
- Address public and regulatory expectations for transparency, responsiveness to landholder concerns, and alignment with agency guidelines and best practices.

Preliminary Focus Areas

- **Native Vegetation and Habitat Loss -** Direct and indirect loss of native plants and habitats, including communities and species listed under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.
- **Habitat Fragmentation & Connectivity -** Maintaining landscape-scale ecological connectivity; mitigating potential barriers to wildlife movement caused by disturbance or infrastructure.
- **Threatened Species -** Targeted surveys for over 40 threatened flora and fauna species, supporting appropriate management of key at-risk populations.
- **Aquatic and Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems-** Review and protection of aquatic habitats and ecosystems reliant on surface and groundwater, including assessment of potential flow changes and groundwater dependent ecosystem.
- **Offset and Conservation Planning -** Early identification of required offsets for unavoidable impacts, and support for the establishment and management of local conservation areas.

Specialist Consultant

GHD had been engaged to conduct all field surveys and the subsequent ecological impact assessments. GHD is a global, employee-owned engineering and environmental consulting firm with over 11,000 professionals operating in 160 offices worldwide. GHD's local Ecology, Natural Sciences and Heritage Group, led by a project director with over 25 years of experience in environmental approvals and management, have extensive experience conducting rigorous ecological surveys in Victoria and interstate, Their flora team are VQA accredited with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). Similarly, their Fauna team have broad experience in habitat assessment and utilising a range of trapping and non-invasive monitoring techniques to target fauna species. More information is available at https://www.ghd.com/en-au

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