Fingerboards Critical Minerals Project Community Reference Group (CRG): Meeting Notes

Meeting Information

Date:	Friday, 15 May 2026	**Location:**	Quest Bairnsdale
Time:	11:30AM to 4:30PM AEST	**Independent Chair:**	John Mitchell
GCM Attendees:	Michelle Wood, Stefan Wolmarans, Loretta Fallaw, Allison Heskey, Murray Holland, Kellie Harpley, Mick Harrington, Shannon O'Neil		
CRG Member Attendees:	Alfred Chown, Andrew Sheridan, Cr Geoff Wells (Wellington Shire Council), Carolyn Cameron, David Radford (East Gippsland Water), Joshua Nelson, Lionel Rose, Peter Reefman, Rohan Reynolds, Simon Padfield, Tess Coverdale, Vesna Rendulic		
Observers:	Grant Clarke (Resources Victoria), Natarsha Richards (RDV), Prue McTaggart (EGSC, arrived following MRDP visit)		
Apologies:	CRG Member Apologies: Graham Watt, Jillian Stewart, John Alexander (departed following the MRDP site visit), Pat Harton, Trevor Hancock Observer Apologies: David Roberts (Regional Development Gippsland)		

Agenda Items

Agenda Items	Presenter
1. Meet at Lindenow Pub – Lunch, Welcome & MRDP Site Induction	All
2. Mining & Rehabilitation Demonstration Pit (MRDP) Tour (Incl. Travel)	Stefan / Allison
3. Apologies	John (Chair)
4. Approval of Previous CRG Minutes (Meeting #6)	John (Chair)
5. Pecuniary Interest Declaration	John (Chair)
6. Votes on Sale Tennis Club Proposal & CRG Sub-Groups	John (Chair)
7. Questions from the CRG/On-Notice Items	All
8. Project Approval / EES Update	Michelle Wood
9. RedBridge: Community Sentiment Survey Findings & Q&A	Kos Samaras
10. Community Engagement Update & Land Management / Good Neighbour Policy	Mick Harrington
11. Meeting Wrap Up & Next Steps	John (Chair)
12. In-Camera Discussion for CRG Members Only	CRG Members

New Action Items / Decisions Made

1. CRG Meeting #6 minutes accepted as amended.
2. GCM to consider structured community benefit-sharing options, such as an endowment or community fund, as part of broader benefit-sharing initiatives for affected local communities.
3. CRG members agreed not to proceed with establishing the proposed Technical Sub-Group and Communications Sub-Group at this time.
4. GCM to establish a dedicated CRG member email address, accessible to CRG members, for submitting questions, raising specific areas of interest, or proposing items for future meetings, to ensure visibility and transparency across the group.
5. Loretta to speak with Andrew Sheridan regarding the logic and reasoning for the MRDP dust monitor locations, with this information also to be communicated to the CRG.
6. GCM to consider publishing periodic summary monitoring reports for data that cannot be uploaded live, e.g. air quality and radiation monitoring data provided on a quarterly summary basis.
7. CRG members to share postal addresses for community members who are willing to provide them, to assist GCM in improving its community address records and mail-out process.
8. RedBridge to prepare and circulate a more detailed report for CRG members, including further information on survey questions, findings and geographic breakdown where available.
9. GCM to organise for RedBridge to attend a future CRG meeting to facilitate a focus group with CRG members.
10. GCM to prepare and circulate an updated draft Good Neighbour Policy before the next CRG meeting, with Mick to contact members for input.
11. GCM to circulate information to CRG members regarding the new community support service, including how community members can access the service.
12. GCM to contact CRG members to reiterate the reimbursement arrangements available for members' time and expenses, and provide members with a further opportunity to claim reimbursement.

Meeting Minutes

1. Meet at Lindenow Pub – Lunch, Welcome & MRDP Site Induction (All)

The Chair, John Mitchell, opened the seventh meeting of the Community Reference Group (CRG) at 11:30am at the Lindenow Pub and welcomed members and observers.

An Acknowledgement of Country was delivered, recognising the Traditional Owners of the land and paying respects to Elders past and present.

Allison delivered the MRDP site induction presentation, which covered site layout, emergency muster points, site access and entry requirements, signage and other site requirements. Lunch was provided for members during the induction session.

Safety gear was distributed to CRG members before members travelled together by bus, arranged by GCM, to the MRDP site.

2. Mining & Rehabilitation Demonstration Pit (MRDP) Tour (Stefan / Allison)

CRG members undertook a tour of the MRDP site, where they were shown the demonstration pit and had the opportunity to ask questions of Project team members.

Members were also introduced to Marcus Binks, MRDP Site Manager, who showed the group the processing plant and demonstrated panning.

3. Apologies (Chair)

Following the MRDP site visit, members returned to Quest Hotel, Bairnsdale. The meeting recommenced at 2:00pm, with members given time to settle before the Chair welcomed everyone back.

The Chair acknowledged that a Welcome to Country had been delivered earlier in the day during the site induction and invited members to reintroduce themselves to the group. Members went around the room and provided their names and brief introductions.

Apologies were noted from CRG members Graham Watt, Pat Harton, Jillian Stewart, John Alexander (who departed following the MRDP site visit), and Trevor Hancock.

Apologies were also noted from observers David Roberts (Regional Development Gippsland) and Prue McTaggart (EGSC; who later arrived at 2:30pm).

4. Approval of Previous CRG Minutes (Meeting #6) (Chair)

Michelle advised that the draft minutes from CRG Meeting #6 had previously been circulated to members. Feedback had been received from CC and LR, and the minutes were then amended and redistributed to members.

Michelle noted that the redistributed version did not include amendments subsequently suggested by PR. A second round of changes was therefore made, and printed copies were provided to members at the meeting. The printed version showed the marked-up changes made since the redistributed version, including PR's proposed amendments.

The Project team took members through each amendment one by one and invited members to raise any concerns.

The amendments were as follows:

- Page 2, Action Items / Decisions Section, Clause 7: Added the wording "as a service at no cost to affected community members" in relation to the wellbeing support pathway.
- Page 3, Item 3 (Approval of Meeting #5 Minutes), Point 3: Added the wording "with lunch to be eaten during the meeting, rather than stopping for a meal" in relation to CRG meeting times and lunch arrangements.
- Page 7, Item 7 (Mine Schedule): Changed the word "flattening" to "shaping" and added the word "minor" before "gullies", in relation to the potential shaping of minor gullies for improved long-term stability where feasible.
- Page 11, Item 11 (Q&A), Question 1: Amended the response regarding whether there is a Mine-Free Glenaladale representative on the CRG. The revised wording confirms that, while Lionel may be affiliated with MFG, he does not formally represent the organisation on the CRG.

All amendments were accepted by CRG members.

The Chair asked whether the meeting notes, as amended, were a true and correct record of CRG Meeting #6. Members agreed to accept the amended notes.

5. Pecuniary Interest Declaration (Chair)

The Chair invited members to declare any pecuniary interests. No additional declarations were made.

6. Votes on Sale Tennis Club Proposal & CRG Sub-Groups (Chair)

Voting Item #1: Sale Tennis Club Proposal

Members agreed that it is not appropriate for the CRG to vote on individual grant applications. GCM will write to Sale Tennis Club to restate its policy position regarding the community grants program.

Members also discussed that any future community contributions should be directed toward initiatives that clearly benefit communities most affected by the Project. Examples raised included funding for the local hospital. A member suggested that GCM could consider a more structured approach, such as an endowment or community fund, to support affected communities over the longer term. GCM noted that this will be considered as part of its broader benefit-sharing initiatives.

Voting Item #2: CRG Sub-Groups Proposal

Michelle noted that the idea of establishing two CRG sub-groups (Technical Sub-Group and Communications Sub-Group), had been raised during earlier CRG meetings, following feedback that some members wanted more detailed discussion on specific matters. She acknowledged that not all issues can be covered in depth during full CRG meetings, and sought members' views on whether the sub-groups should still proceed.

PR noted that separate sub-groups could create scheduling challenges and become difficult for members to manage, even where members had a strong interest in particular topics.

JN suggested establishing a dedicated CRG member email address. Under this approach, members could submit questions or items for discussion, with responses circulated to all CRG members to ensure transparency.

AS supported the need for more focused discussion on specific topic areas, noting that members may have different areas of interest or expertise, such as dust. During this discussion, AS raised concerns about the location of the MRDP dust monitors, noting that dust is a key issue for the community and that he had understood there would be an opportunity for CRG input into monitoring locations.

Dust Monitor Locations: Stefan explained that the dust monitoring locations were selected based on wind rose data and displayed a Project map to show the monitoring stations positioned around the MRDP pit. Stefan noted that there had been no intention to exclude the CRG from discussion, but acknowledged that the process had not been clearly communicated back to members. Loretta will speak with AS about the logic and reasoning for the dust monitor locations, with this information also to be communicated to the CRG.

Members asked whether the monitors measure different types of dust. Stefan confirmed that the monitors measure different particle sizes, including PM2.5 and PM10, and that triggers activate an alarm and prompt an operational response.

Stefan noted that he is available to respond to specific technical questions. Michelle agreed that the preferred approach would be for members to raise specific questions or areas of interest with Michelle or Mick, who could then connect members with the relevant Project team representative. Responses could then be circulated to the full CRG group via the group email, ensuring all members have visibility of the questions and answers.

Following discussion, members agreed not to proceed with establishing the two formal CRG sub-groups at this time. Instead, GCM will establish a CRG member email address for members to submit questions, raise specific areas of interest, or propose items for future meetings. Responses and relevant information will be circulated to all CRG members to support transparency and consistency.

7. Questions from the CRG/On-Notice Items (All)

Registered Mail / Community Mail-Outs:

TC raised GCM's recent Facebook post regarding registered mail and queried why this had been raised as a concern, noting that the mail had been received and that previous concerns related to some people not receiving mail.

LR clarified that the original mail-out was intended to occur last year, and GCM's decision to send this mail material required some recipients to travel to collect their mail. RR added that registered mail must also be collected within a specified timeframe.

Michelle confirmed that she had discussed the issue with LR and acknowledged that the registered mail process had caused inconvenience for some community members, particularly where people were required to travel to collect mail within a limited timeframe. Michelle advised that GCM would no longer use registered mail for this purpose and would instead engage a private mail distribution company.

In relation to the previous letterbox drop, Kellie confirmed that she had followed up with Australia Post regarding reports that some residents had not received the material. As the delivery was not tracked, Australia Post could not provide a definitive explanation.

Michelle noted that GCM has engaged an independent contractor to undertake future letterbox drops and is continuing to work to improve its address records. CRG members were encouraged to share postal details for community members who are willing to provide them.

8. Approval / EES Update (Michelle Wood)

Michelle provided an update on the Project approvals process and reiterated that Fingerboards is currently progressing through the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process, which involves assessment across 17 technical disciplines, with baseline monitoring undertaken separately.

Michelle advised that the Mining and Rehabilitation Demonstration Pit (MRDP) is now underway and represents an important regulatory milestone for GCM. She noted that many submissions received during the 2021 process called for further rehabilitation trials and demonstration work. While the MRDP is not a formal requirement of the EES, it will provide useful data to inform the EES studies.

In the context of the broader approval timeline, Michelle notes that public exhibition of the draft scoping requirements is expected to commence in June 2026. It was noted that the Victorian Government has indicated an intention to progress EES processes within an 18-month timeframe. On that basis, the Project is expected to be before the Minister for a decision by approximately December 2027.

EPBC Determination: Michelle advised that, earlier that morning on 15 May, the Commonwealth Government had made its determination under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). The determination identified four controlling provisions requiring assessment. Michelle noted that this was standard and in line with GCM's expectations, and that GCM's environmental and technical studies are already underway in relation to each of these areas.

Michelle explained that one of the EPBC Act controlling provisions for the Project relates to nuclear actions under sections 21 and 22A of the EPBC Act. This is because the current nuclear action provisions include a technical threshold of 1 becquerel per gram (Bq/g). Where naturally occurring radioactive material exceeds this threshold in one part of a project, the broader project may be captured by that controlling provision. However, the following was noted on nuclear action trigger and the EPBC:

- At Fingerboards, this threshold is reached only within the enclosed heavy mineral concentrate storage shed. The material remains below that level throughout the rest of the Project.
- Reforms to the EPBC Act, passed in late 2025 and coming into effect in July 2026, will introduce a new radiological exposure action framework, which expressly excludes mineral sands operations.
- As GCM referred the Fingerboards Project at the earliest opportunity to align with the EES process, the EPBC determination was made under the current legislative framework. Accordingly, the new radiological exposure action framework does not apply to this determination.

JN asked whether GCM knew the Project would exceed the relevant threshold. Michelle confirmed that GCM was aware the heavy mineral concentrate storage shed would exceed the 1 Bq/g threshold, but noted that GCM had anticipated the possibility that the Project may be assessed under the incoming EPBC Act reforms. However, as the determination was made under the current framework, the existing nuclear action provisions apply. Michelle reiterated that this does not change GCM's current assessment work, as the relevant areas are already being addressed through the EES studies.

9. RedBridge: Community Sentiment Survey Findings & Q&A(Kos Samaras)

Kos Samaras, Director Strategy and Analytics at RedBridge, joined the meeting via Teams and outlined:

- RedBridge is an independent research and strategy consultancy engaged by GCM as part of their regulatory requirements to deliver a structured community research program, alternating approximately every six months between quantitative surveys and qualitative focus groups.
- Quantitative surveys are conducted through an online panel, with responses collected over approximately two to three weeks and analysed to provide insights across a range of issues
- qualitative focus groups allow for more detailed discussion and exploration of views.

Kos presented findings from the two most recent quantitative studies, undertaken in May 2025 and November 2025:

- The May 2025 survey showed increased awareness and support for the Project compared with earlier research, with 73% of respondents aware of the Project and 45% indicating support. Kos noted that the results suggested the community is not necessarily opposed to new industries but want to be informed, involved and confident in how they are managed.
- The November 2025 survey showed support remained steady at 44%, with 21% of respondents neutral. He noted that environmental and community impacts were key factors influencing people's views, followed by jobs and how the site would be operated and rehabilitated. The survey also indicated strong support for Australia becoming more self-reliant in critical minerals production and developing new critical minerals projects in regional areas, when appropriate safeguards are in place.
- In all surveys- community support is closely linked to confidence in safeguards, environmental management and responsible project delivery.

The following questions were asked to Kos during the Q&A session:

Distance of survey participants from the Project site: PR asked about distance participants were to the Project site, noting that responses may differ between communities depending on proximity to the Project, and asked whether there was a breakdown by distance to the site.

- Kos advised that RedBridge may now have enough cumulative data to undertake a more granular analysis across all research completed to date. He noted that individual survey samples may be too small for detailed local breakdowns, but the combined data may allow further analysis.
- Kos also noted that, based on previous research, RedBridge does not generally see a significant drop-off in concern based solely on distance, as regional communities often show empathy for others living near major projects.
- Members requested further detail on where survey respondents were located, including whether respondents closer to the Project area expressed different levels of concern.

Request for detailed report: CC asked whether a more detailed report could be provided, including the questions asked in the surveys and how the Project was introduced to participants.

- Kos agreed to prepare a more detailed report for the CRG, including further information on the survey questions, findings and geographic breakdown where available. The report will be circulated to members.

Understanding "safeguards": Michelle asked whether focus group participants had discussed what they understood by the term "safeguards".

- Kos advised that participants generally expect government to play an important role in setting and enforcing safeguards. However, he noted that it is advantageous for companies to take a proactive approach, and that the work GCM is doing to engage with the community is important.
- Kos also noted that Victoria has not historically been viewed as a major mining state, meaning communities may not have the same direct comparisons or historical experiences with mining projects as other jurisdictions.

Survey methodology: LR raised that anonymous or automated survey methods could affect the accuracy of the data, especially the use of rating scales in surveys, such as "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

- Kos explained that the quantitative surveys are conducted using an online panel. He noted that other methodologies are available, including live interviewer-led surveys, where an interviewer based in Australia speaks directly with participants.
- Michelle suggested that, if CRG members were open to it, RedBridge could facilitate a focus group with the CRG as part of a future meeting. Members voted on the proposal and agreed to proceed with a CRG focus group.

As next steps, RedBridge will prepare a more detailed report for CRG members, including further information on the survey questions, findings and geographic breakdown where available. GCM will also organise for RedBridge to attend a future CRG meeting to facilitate a focus group with members.

10. Community Engagement Update & Land Management / Good Neighbour Policy (Mick Harrington)

Mick provided an update on recent and upcoming community engagement activities and noted that a draft Good Neighbour Policy had been circulated to CRG members for feedback.

Prue asked whether GCM had engaged with Gippsland Agricultural Group (GAG), noting that they were considering similar matters/developing a similar policy. Mick advised that GCM had engaged with GAG previously, but not specifically in relation to the draft Good Neighbour Policy.

Good Neighbour Policy: Members discussed several matters for inclusion or clarification in the policy, including:

- weed mapping, reassessment of known weed locations and weed management;
- active pest animal management, including clarification of the definition of “pest”;
- the process for kangaroo management, including evidence gathering by an approved contractor and assessment by DEECA before any further action;
- ensuring any pest animal management is undertaken in line with relevant approvals and regulatory requirements;
- washdown requirements for vehicles entering and leaving the MRDP site, including contractors and visitors;
- identifying GCM and contractor vehicles, such as through magnetic vehicle signage; and
- including information on local weed species, such as muck grass, as part of site induction processes for GCM team members and contractors.

RR asked whether GCM had considered employing a dedicated person for weed management rather than relying only on contractors. Michelle advised that this is being considered.

Mick invited members to provide any further specific feedback directly to him and noted that he would be in touch with members to seek their input. These matters will be considered as part of the next review of the Good Neighbour Policy.

Benefit Sharing Workshops: Mick advised that, while formal CRG sub-groups would not proceed, GCM intends to hold community workshops on benefit sharing. The workshops will provide an opportunity for the broader community to discuss priorities and provide input on key themes, including local jobs, training pathways, infrastructure, partnerships and community investment.

The following dates are proposed for the workshops:

- Wednesday, 27/05/2026 at 5:00pm – 7:00pm
- Tuesday, 09/06/2026 at 11:00am – 1:00pm
- Wednesday, 24/06/2026 at 5:00pm – 7:00pm

The sessions will be advertised and open to the public, not limited to CRG members, but CRG members welcome to attend and contribute. Prue asked about community interest and feedback from East Gippsland and Wellington, including whether there had been any backlash against GCM-supported events. Michelle and Mick noted that GCM continues to receive enquiries and requests for local support, and that while some opposition activity occurs online, GCM has not seen broad objection to its support for local events.

11. Meeting Wrap Up & Next Steps (Chair)

The Chair invited any further questions from CRG members.

MRDP Monitoring Data: RR asked whether live radiation and noise data from the MRDP monitoring stations would be made available**.**

- Stefan advised that live radiation data cannot be provided in the same way due to the format of the data, but that live noise data can be made available. He noted that weather station data is already online, and that air quality data should be able to be provided through reporting.
- Loretta noted the importance of ensuring that any data shared is meaningful and appropriately explained. The Project team advised that it is not seeking to hide information, but that reporting should include context, such as relevant time periods, trends and explanations for any elevated readings. GCM will consider publishing summary monitoring reports periodically for monitoring data that cannot be uploaded live.

Water Update: RR requested an update on water sources for the Project.

- Michelle advised that discussions are continuing with East Gippsland Water regarding the potential use of a recycled water pipeline, with recycled water increasingly likely to form the primary water source for the Project.

Social Media: RR raised concerns about comments and conduct on social media which he felt were getting increasingly nasty and damaging.

- Michelle advised that GCM had recently restated its social media guidelines and had begun removing comments that do not comply with those guidelines. She acknowledged that deleting comments can attract criticism, but noted that GCM is seeking to manage its pages respectfully and consistently. Michelle also noted that GCM has recently appointed a new team member to assist with social media.
- Members discussed the challenges of responding to comments online, including that replies can sometimes escalate discussion. It was noted that GCM does not want to close comments, but will continue to manage its social media pages in line with its guidelines.

Town Hall Meeting: RR asked about whether a town hall meeting would be held.

- Michelle said that it would be unlikely given the tone of conversation on the social media and also given the recent example of a similar session in Trafalgar which was confrontational.
- Murray said he was uncomfortable with nastiness at the Gippsland Field Days and VR said sessions held by Kalbar had also been confrontational.
- Michelle said her team felt it was a safety concern and that she had evaluated what value it would add to the wider community and that sessions such ask the expert sessions would be more beneficial at this stage. She also noted she continues to seek engagement with MFG and they refuse.

GLaWAC Engagement: RR asked whether there was any further update regarding GLaWAC engagement.

- Michelle advised that engagement is ongoing through the appropriate channels and processes, noting that GCM would ideally like to pursue a Pathways to Partnership Agreement, subject to ongoing collaboration and consultation with GLaWAC.

Michelle wrapped up the meeting with three final considerations for members:

- **Community Support Service:** GCM has established a free community support service since the previous CRG meeting. The service will be provided confidentially by an independent provider, and further information on how to access the service will be circulated to members by email.
- **CRG Member Reimbursement:** Michelle noted that reimbursement for CRG members' time and expenses had been raised early in the CRG process. GCM will email members to reiterate the reimbursement arrangements, ensure the process is clear and consistent, and give members the option again to claim reimbursement.
- **Feedback on CRG Meetings:** Members were invited to provide feedback to John or Mick on the CRG meetings to date, including whether the meetings are meaningful, whether more time is needed, and any proposed changes for GCM's consideration.

12. In-Camera Discussion for CRG Members Only (CRG Members)

GCM team members left the room at 4:35PM and CRG members who wished to participate remained in the room. No notes or recordings were taken during the in-camera discussion.

The Independent Chair, John Mitchell subsequently advised that the In Camera session concluded at 5.35PM.

Meeting closed at 5:35PM AEST
Next meeting scheduled for Friday 21 August 2026, 12:00-4:30PM