

Latrobe Valley Regional REHABILITATION STRATEGY OVERVIEW

Closing the Loop

WHAT WE HEARD

The *Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation Strategy Overview* was available for public consultation through Engage Victoria from 20 November 2019 to 17 January 2020.

Those who participated in this consultation process were asked a series of multiple choice, open and demographic questions.

A total of 31 responses were received, with 21 of these responding directly to the survey questions and 10 submissions that were either longer or didn't respond directly to the survey questions but provided valuable feedback on the Overview.

Feedback was provided by organisations involved in energy, agriculture, Traditional Owner interests and the environment as well as individual community members.

A range of views were provided by stakeholders on their preferred rehabilitation option and final landform. Through this, a strong desire was expressed for a range of rehabilitation options to be considered, including non-water-based options, as well as those that use alternative water sources.

During the consultation period, and consistently through the development of the LVRRS, the electricity generators and mine operators have maintained that they and the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry (HMFI) have previously considered a range of rehabilitation options, including non-water based options.

Based on these assessments, water remains their preferred option to deliver a safe and stable landform, predominantly due to the lack of availability of other fill materials and the comparative cost of this approach.

Stakeholders who were uncertain about the future availability of water were particularly keen to see other options for mine rehabilitation explored, with some expressing concern around a perception that water was already the preferred/only feasible option. In the event water was to be used for mine rehabilitation, a number of stakeholders

were keen to ensure that this doesn't come at the expense of existing water uses. Across almost all stakeholders that provided responses, there was a desire for clarity on the availability of, and access conditions for any water that might be made available for mine rehabilitation. This was regardless of their view on the use of water for mine rehabilitation.

Some stakeholders cited the internationally significant Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site as a priority for water into the future.

Regardless of the final landform, many stakeholders wanted to see the rehabilitated voids and surrounding land offer amenity to the region and Victoria more broadly.

Regarding amenity, the mine operators emphasised their legislative obligations to achieve rehabilitated landforms that are safe, stable and sustainable, but stressed that anything beyond this may not be achievable without leadership from and partnership with government.

Stakeholders often articulated the role of government in mine rehabilitation as either protecting or preserving what they identified as important, which included the environment and water resources as well as access to the region's coal resource.

Respondents who wanted to retain access to the coal resource didn't want rehabilitation plans to preclude future access to this significant resource and the potential economic benefits this could bring.

Government was also viewed as having a role in assessing risks and alternative rehabilitation options, as well as providing guidance to and working in partnership with mine operators.

Mine operators saw a role for government in bringing multiple stakeholders to the table and being able to support rehabilitation options that might require a regional approach (e.g. water for rehabilitation from alternative sources).

Given the role of government in the Latrobe Valley's mining and power generation sector before privatisation, a number of stakeholders saw government as having some responsibility in the delivery of the ultimate rehabilitation outcome.

According to the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), which represents the Traditional Owners of the land where the mines are located, as well as the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, government should facilitate collaboration regarding mine rehabilitation.

GLaWAC acknowledged the establishment of the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority by government as a good step, noting the role of government in rehabilitation and healing of Country.

Given the unique connection to Country that Traditional Owners have, particularly through the region's wetlands, rivers and lakes, it is important for government and power generators/mine operators to understand this connection in rehabilitation.

The need to foster collaborative relationships between mine operators, government and Traditional Owners to achieve this was also noted.

There was a strong desire for respondents to be regularly engaged through the mine rehabilitation process, not just at the beginning and/or end of the process. It was suggested that stakeholders should be engaged through a range of media and be given the opportunity to access the supporting technical reports should they want to.

A range of engagement options were suggested, from attendance at community events to citizen science programs. An Environmental Effects Statement was also suggested by several respondents as a method for public involvement in mine rehabilitation decisions.

Given the desire for involvement in the process, clarity on the assessment and decision-making process is seen as particularly important.

Clarity on the specific terms and concepts was also seen as important. For example, clarity on what is considered sustainable would benefit both mine operators and other key stakeholders such as the community. Clarity on access to water, on what government sees as an acceptable level of risk, and guidance as to what constitutes safe and stable rehabilitation were other common issues cited.

A number of respondents noted that mine rehabilitation is a complex issue and whilst there is a desire for certainty, there is a need to balance this with flexibility in the face of possible changes in future regional conditions such as climate.

WHAT WE'VE DONE TO ADDRESS FEEDBACK AND NEXT STEPS

The LVRRS Project Team will carefully consider each of the submissions received as part of this process. The team acknowledges that a large amount of work has gone into many of these and will look to address as much of the feedback received as appropriate in the final LVRRS.