EES Scoping Requirements Blue Hills Quarry

Environment Effects Act 1978

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Acknowledgement of Country

We proudly acknowledge the First Peoples of Victoria. We acknowledge their ongoing strength in practising the worlds' oldest living culture. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners' lands, waters and skies on which we live and work. We also pay our respect to their Elders past and present.



Description of artwork

Aaron Duggan (Gunaikurnai) 'Movements Between the Five Clans' 2019, acrylic on canvas

'The tracks are going between the five clans of the Gunaikurnai and the hands are the symbols of my spirit travelling around the campsites.'

This artwork was created through programs provided by the Torch. The Torch provides art, cultural and arts industry support to Indigenous offenders and ex-offenders in Victoria. The Torch aims to reduce the rate of re-offending by encouraging the exploration of identity and culture through art programs to define new pathways upon release.

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Queries about the Blue Hills Quarry EES should be directed to the proponent:

E.B. Mawsons & Sons Pty Ltd (Mawsons)

Email: bluehillsproject@mawsons.com.au

Website: https://www.mawsons.com.au/news/blue-hills-quarry

Queries about the EES process and Scoping Requirements should be directed to the department:

Impact Assessment Unit

Telephone: (03) 8572 7980

Email: environment.assessment@transport.vic.gov.au

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1. Introduction

In light of the potential for significant environmental effects, on 3 October 2025 the Minister for Planning (the Minister) determined under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* that E.B. Mawsons & Sons Pty Ltd (Mawsons) (the proponent) is to prepare an environment effects statement (EES) for the proposed Blue Hills Quarry Project (the project).

The purpose of the EES is to provide a sufficiently detailed description of the project, assess its potential effects on the environment[1] and assess relevant feasible alternatives (e.g., project alignments, layouts, designs) and approaches to avoid and mitigate effects. The EES will inform and seek feedback from the public and stakeholders. The Minister will issue an assessment of the project's environmental effects under the Environment Effects Act to conclude the EES process. The Minister's assessment will then inform statutory decision-makers for the project.

These *Scoping Requirements Blue Hills Quarry Environment Effects Statement* set out the proposed specific matters to be investigated and documented in the EES.

These scoping requirements provide clarity on the risk-based approach to environmental assessment for the EES, and what the potentially significant effects and priority themes are for investigations. This helps the proponent, in consultation with the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and agencies on the Technical Reference Group (TRG), tailor its approach to EES studies, investigations and integration, to concentrate primarily on the potentially significant effects and priority matters most important for an adequate EES and subsequent decision-making. While the scoping requirements are intended to cover all relevant matters, the EES will also need to address other issues that emerge during the EES investigations, especially potential impacts and environmental issues relevant to statutory decisions that will be informed by the assessment.

1.1. The project and setting

The Blue Hills Quarry is a proposed hornfels hard rock quarry situated on an elevated hill on the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung people. It is located in the Mount Alexander Shire local government area, approximately 25 kilometres south-west of Bendigo, near Bradford (refer to Figure 1). The proposed quarry is located on land zoned as farming and owned by Mawson's Pty Ltd. The project site contains native vegetation, and surrounding land uses are predominately agricultural, with a number of sensitive receptors in the vicinity of the site.

The proposed project components include a 34.5 hectare quarry, a 4.5 kilometre haul road and ancillary infrastructure such as a stockpiling area, vehicle workshop, office area, and site power and water reticulation. Excavation, blasting and dewatering are required to establish the quarry to depths of up to 90 metres below ground. The quarry is expected to produce up to 500,000 tonnes per annum of product at peak operation and be operational for 70 to 100 years. An average of 60 loads per day will be transported at its peak.

Rehabilitation of the site would be progressively undertaken and completed following the productive life of the quarry.

[1] For assessment of environmental effects under the EE Act, the meaning of 'environment' includes physical, biological, heritage, cultural, social, health, safety and economic aspects (Ministerial Guidelines, p. 2).

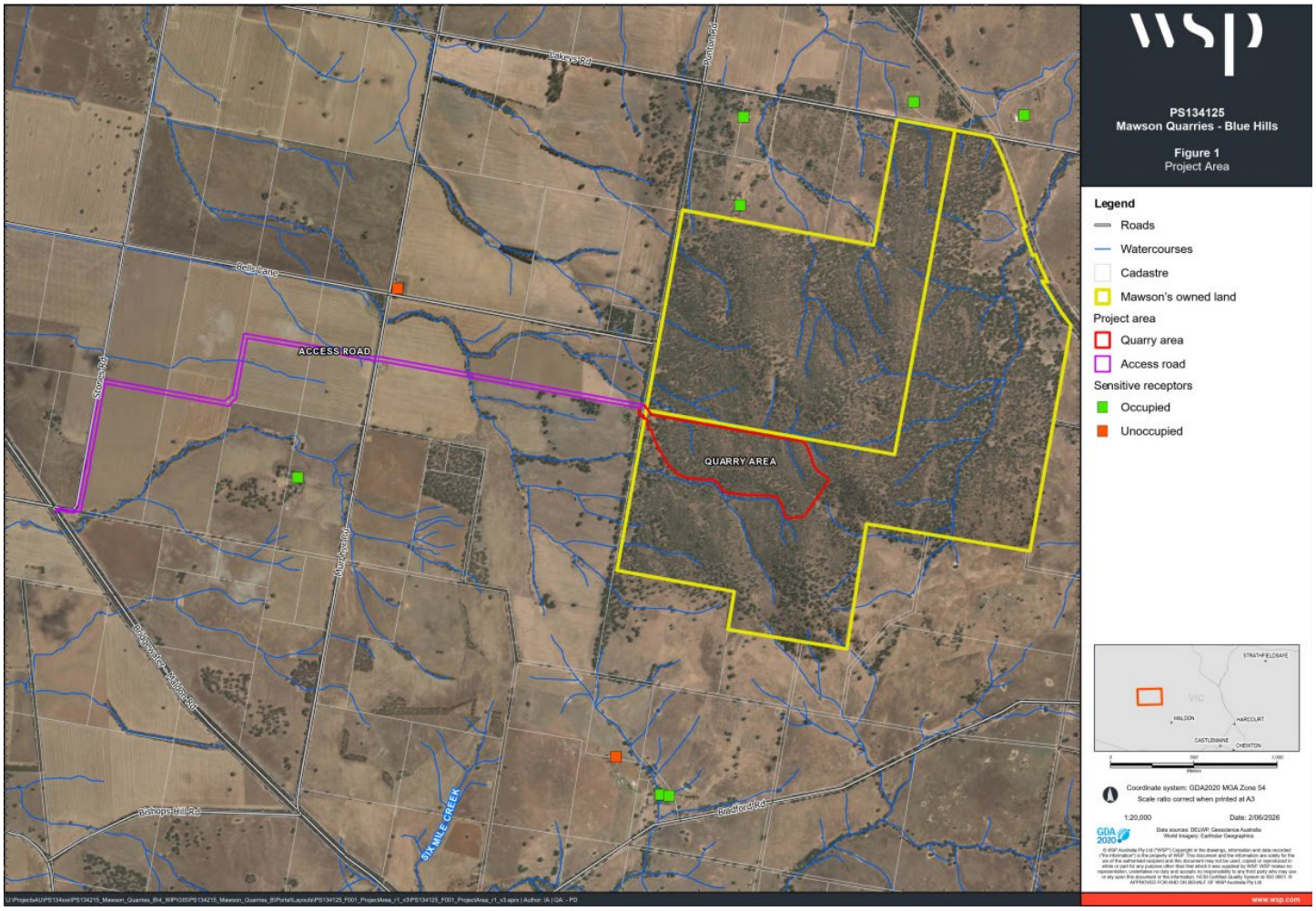


Figure 1: Project location

1.2. Minister's requirements for this EES

In light of the potential for significant environmental effects, the Minister for Planning decided that an EES is required to assess the potential environmental effects of the project. The Minister published procedures and requirements applicable to the preparation of the EES, in accordance with section 8B(5) of the Environment Effects Act (see Appendix A). The investigations and assessments are to include feasible project alternatives and design refinements (e.g. alternative project layouts, siting of infrastructure, management measures, project staging and timing) to avoid, minimise, and manage effects, particularly for [2]:

- native vegetation and associated biodiversity values including listed threatened species and communities, such as through the loss, degradation or fragmentation of habitat or through other indirect causes, as well as related ecological effects;
- surface water and groundwater and associated environmental values (e.g. groundwater dependent ecosystems) from the project, such as excavation, dewatering and offsite discharges;
- Aboriginal cultural heritage and historic heritage values;
- traffic and safety, from heavy vehicles movements to and from the site on the public road system, and any associated road safety implications; and
- amenity (air, noise and vibration), landscape and community values.

[2] Procedures and requirements under section 8B(5) of the *Environment Effects Act 1978* for the Blue Hills Quarry project https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/browse-projects/referrals/blue-hills-quarry

These scoping requirements provide further detail on the matters to be in investigated in the EES as required by the *Ministerial guidelines for assessment of environmental effects under the Environment Effects 1978* (Ministerial Guidelines), and are informed by the proponent's study program, its initial risk screening and assessment by DTP.

2. Assessment process and required approvals

2.1. What is an EES?

An EES describes a project, its rationale and benefits, and its potential environmental effects. It should enable stakeholders and decision-makers to understand how the project is proposed to be implemented and the likely environmental effects of doing so. An EES has two main components:

- **EES main report** – an integrated, plain English document that assesses the potential impacts of the project; examines avoidance, mitigation or other measures to reduce the environmental effects; and concludes with assessment of the residual effects.

  The main report draws on technical reports, should be analytical rather than encyclopaedic in approach, and should clearly identify which components of the scope are being addressed throughout.

- **EES appendices** – specialist technical reports, with investigations and analysis that provides the basis for the EES main report. Technical reports should provide details of literature and database reviews, methods and results of field and laboratory investigations or modelling, and methods and results of impact assessments.

2.2. The EES process

The proponent is responsible for preparing an EES, including conducting technical studies and undertaking appropriate stakeholder consultation. DTP is responsible for managing the EES process [3]. The EES process has the following steps:

- preparation of a draft study program and draft schedule by the proponent;
- preparation and exhibition of draft scoping requirements by DTP, on behalf of the Minister, with public comments received during the advertised exhibition period;
- finalisation and issuing of scoping requirements by the Minister or delegate;
- review of the proponent's EES studies and draft documentation by DTP and a TRG [4];
- completion of the EES by the proponent;
- review of the complete EES by DTP to establish its adequacy for public exhibition;
- exhibition of the proponent's EES and invitation for public comment;
- appointment of an inquiry by the Minister to review the EES and public submissions received, conduct public hearings and provide a report to the Minister; and finally
- following receipt of the inquiry report, preparation of an assessment by the Minister on whether the project's environmental effects are acceptable for the consideration of statutory decision-makers.

2.2.1. Technical reference group

DTP has convened a TRG of state and regional agencies, and local council for this EES process to advise DTP and the proponent on:

[3] Further information on the EES process can be found at planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/what-is-the-ees-process-in-victoria

[4] For critical components of the EES studies, peer review by an external, independent expert (or panel of experts) may be appropriate.

- applicable policies, strategies and statutory provisions;
- EES scoping requirements;
- the design and adequacy of EES technical studies;
- the proponent's public information and stakeholder consultation program for the EES process;
- responses to issues arising from the EES investigations;
- the technical adequacy and completeness of draft EES documentation; and
- coordination of statutory processes.

2.2.2. EES consultation

The proponent is responsible for engaging the public and stakeholders during the EES process, to inform them about the project, the EES process and EES studies. The proponent's EES consultation must enable feedback and local knowledge to be inputted on the project and its potential environmental effects, as well as respond to issues raised. Stakeholders include potentially affected parties, traditional owner groups, any interested community organisations/groups and government bodies.

The proponent is responsible for preparing and implementing an EES consultation plan that sets out the approach to engagement. The proponent's EES consultation plan is reviewed and amended in consultation with DTP and the TRG before it is published on the Planning website [5]. The EES consultation plan will:

- identify stakeholders;
- characterise public and stakeholders' interests, concerns and consultation needs, local knowledge and inputs;
- describe consultation methods and schedule; and
- outline how public and stakeholder inputs will be recorded, considered and/or addressed in the preparation of the EES.

2.2.3. Traditional Owner engagement

The EES should be developed with acknowledgement of and respect for Traditional Owners' care for and connection to Country. Through the EES, the proponent should seek to understand the direct and indirect ways in which the project could affect these interests. To this end, the EES should be informed by engagement with Traditional Owners.

The proponent should support and enable culturally appropriate, informed and meaningful engagement with Traditional Owners, including by:

- asking Traditional Owner groups about the engagement processes that would be suitable;
- endeavouring to develop good working relationships;
- taking into account and respecting the cultural and communication needs and protocols of communities;
- engaging early and providing appropriate timeframes to consider and respond to information; and
- genuinely seeking input and expertise.

The EES consultation plan should set out the mechanisms to be established by the proponent to support and enable Traditional Owner engagement as well as outline how the views and expertise offered by Traditional Owners will be integrated into the EES.

2.2.4. Statutory approvals and the EES process

The project will require a range of approvals under Victorian legislation if it is to proceed. DTP coordinates the EES process as closely as practicable with the approvals procedures, consultation and public notice requirements.

[5] Available online at https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/browse-projects/referrals/blue-hills-quarry

To facilitate informed and efficient decision-making on required key approvals following the EES process, it is recommended that the EES documentation address relevant information and requirements associated with those key approvals that will be informed by the EES and Minister's assessment.

No planning permit under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (P&E Act) will be required for extractive-related works given there is an EES being undertaken for this project, provided they are within the work authority area and the requirements of section 77T of the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* (MRSD Act) are fulfilled. However, the project may trigger planning permit requirements for other project elements outside of the work authority area.

The MRSD Act was amended resulting in changes that will take effect from 1 July 2027, including a duty-based model for regulating earth resources projects. Under the changes to this legislation, licensees/work authority holders must take reasonably practicable steps to minimise risks to the environment, land, property and infrastructure as well as be required to prepare a rehabilitation plan.[6]

The project will require an approved cultural heritage management plan (CHMP) under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. The Project is situated on land for which Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation is the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) under the Aboriginal Heritage Act. The proponent will engage directly with the RAP in relation to the preparation of the CHMP.

The project may also require approvals under the *Environment Protection Act 2017*; permits under the *Water Act 1989*; permit to take, keep or move protected flora and fauna (under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and consents under the *Road Management Act 2004*.

2.3. Accreditation of the EES process under the EPBC Act

The project has been referred to the Commonwealth under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). A delegate for the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Water determined on 5 May 2025 that the project is a controlled action (EPBC 2025/10133), as it is likely to have a significant impact[7] on the following matters of national environmental significance (MNES), which are protected under Part 3 of the EPBC Act:

- listed threatened species and communities (section 18 and 18A)

The EES process is accredited to assess impacts on MNES under the EPBC Act through the *Bilateral (Assessment) Agreement between the Commonwealth and the State of Victoria*. This removes duplication, enabling a single assessment process to examine the project's likely impacts and inform statutory decisions.

At the conclusion of the EES process it should provide sufficient information to enable the Commonwealth Minister or delegate to assess impacts on MNES. The proponent's EES needs to include sufficient information on the proposed action and likely relevant impacts. The Minister for Planning's assessment under the Environment Effects Act is provided to the Commonwealth Minister or delegate, to inform their decision on whether the project should be approved, approved with conditions, or refused under the EPBC Act.,

3. Preparing the EES

3.1. General approach

The EES should provide a clear, objective and well-integrated analysis of the potential effects of the proposed project, including proposed environmental management measures, as well as feasible alternatives. The description and assessment of effects must not be confined to the immediate area of the project but must

[6] *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Act 2023*

[7] Note that 'relevant impacts' defined in section 82 of the EPBC Act correspond to what are generally termed 'effects' in the EES process.

also consider the potential of the project to impact on nearby environmental values, including areas potentially impacted by offsite components of the project.

The EES needs to document the analysis of the significance of the potential effects of the project, with consideration of the following approach which is to be applied for the specific environmental matters and issues set out in section 4 of this document:

1. **Characterise the existing environment** and identify relevant environmental values to underpin impact assessments, having regard to the systems and risk-based approach.

Characterisation of the existing environment is to be informed by relevant databases and registers, literature (and published data), previous studies, land use history, overlays in relevant planning schemes, community observations (including citizen science and information from residents and landholders in or adjacent to the area of interest), appropriate targeted and/or seasonal surveys and modelling of the potential and actual presence of sensitivities (such as threatened species and communities, cultural heritage etc) consistent with Commonwealth and state guidelines, conservation advices and threatened species recovery plans or action statements. Where surveys do not identify a sensitivity, but past records and/or modelling analysis suggest that it may occur, a risk-based, precautionary approach to the further investigation and assessment of its occurrence should be adopted.

2. **Identify the potential effects** of the project on the environment (pre-mitigation), including those caused indirectly as a result of proposed activities, considering aspects such as magnitude, extent, duration, and significance of change in the values of each asset.
3. **Present design refinement and mitigation measures** that could achieve avoidance, reduction and/or mitigation of the potential effects and in doing so, apply the mitigation hierarchy with justification of why higher order measures cannot be applied.
    i. Avoidance: measures taken to avoid creating adverse effects, such as careful spatial or temporal placement of infrastructure or disturbance.
    ii. Minimisation: measures taken to reduce the duration, intensity and/or extent of effects that cannot be avoided.
    iii. Rehabilitation/restoration: measures taken to stabilise or restore an area after disturbance to achieve previous, improved or future land uses following exposure to impacts.
    iv. Offsets [8]: measures taken to compensate for residual, adverse effects following implementation of the previous three steps of the mitigation hierarchy.
4. **Assess the likely residual effects** of the project on the environment and evaluate the significance of each effect considering the likely effectiveness of the design and mitigation measures. Significance of residual effects should consider local, regional, state and federal matters.

Residual environmental effects need to be clearly described for each project phase, i.e., construction, operation and decommissioning. The description and assessment of effects must consider the potential of the project to impact on environmental values beyond the immediate project area, including areas downstream.

In addition, the cumulative effects of the project in combination with other planned and approved activities in the broader area / region should be assessed and considered in the proposed design and mitigation measures.

5. **Propose an approach to managing performance** that should include criteria, monitoring and evaluation to check that predicted outcomes are being achieved during project implementation, as well as contingency

[8] The proponent is encouraged to identify opportunities to engage with Traditional Owner groups to develop and deliver rehabilitation/restoration measures as well as environmental offsets.

approaches if monitoring demonstrates adverse effects exceed those predicted or permitted and justification for any aspects where monitoring is not proposed.

3.2. Content and format of the EES

Overall, the main report should include:

- an executive summary;
- a description of the project, including its objectives, rationale, key elements, resource use, associated requirements for new infrastructure and use of existing infrastructure;
- an overview of the proponent's environmental performance and track record, including experience in delivering similar projects, organisation health, safety, environmental and community engagement policies, ability to build trusted relationships with stakeholders and Traditional Owner groups and whether the proponent has been subject to any past or present proceedings under a Commonwealth, state or territory law for the protection of the environment or the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources;
- a description of the approvals required for the project to proceed, and their relationship to relevant laws, policies, strategies, guidelines and standards;
- a description of feasible alternatives capable of substantially meeting the project's objectives that may also offer environmental or other benefits including the basis for any nomination of a preferred alternative;
- a description of the scope, timing [9] and method for studies or surveys used to provide information on the values of the project area, as well as any records and other data from local sources gathered;
- descriptions of the existing environment and the predicted future environment (such as projected climate change scenarios), where this is relevant to the assessment of potential effects of the project;
- appropriately detailed assessments of potential effects of the project on environmental values and assets, relative to the "no project" scenario, together with an estimation of likelihood and degree of uncertainty associated with predictions;
- clear, active measures for avoiding, minimising, managing and monitoring effects, including a statement of commitment to implement these measures;
- predictions of residual effects of the project assuming implementation of proposed management measures;
- any proposed offset measures where avoidance and other mitigation measures will not adequately address effects on environmental values, including for relevant MNES;
- documentation of the process and results of the consultation undertaken by the proponent during the preparation of the EES, including the issues raised by stakeholders or the public and the proponent's responses to these issues, in the context of the EES studies and the associated consideration of mitigation measures;
- evaluation of the implications of legislation and policy for the project and feasible alternatives;
- evaluation against the principles and objectives of ecologically sustainable development [10];
- conclusions on the significance of impacts on local, regional, state and federal matters; and,
- the findings on federal matters (MNES) might be consolidated into a specific chapter.

The EES should also outline an approach to furthering Traditional Owner engagement and partnerships during project implementation including, as appropriate, in the management of Country.

The proponent may choose to prepare a website with interactive functionality to provide an alternative way of accessing EES information, which may complement the conventional EES main report and technical reports. Such an approach must be discussed with DTP Impact Assessment Unit, and if integrated with the EES documentation, the digital information is to be provided to the TRG for review.

[9] Surveys of assets, values and potential effects must be timed to ensure they take account of seasonal weather patterns of the area.

[10] Ecologically sustainable development is defined on page 9 of the Ministerial Guidelines.

The proponent must also prepare a concise, graphical-based non-technical summary document of the project (hard copy A4, no more than 25 pages) for free distribution to interested parties during public exhibition of the EES. The EES summary document should also include details of the EES exhibition, public submission process and availability of the EES documentation and any digital information.

3.3. Project description and rationale

The EES is to describe the project in sufficient detail both to allow an understanding of all components, processes and development stages, and to enable assessment of their likely potential environmental effects. The project description should canvass the following:

- contextual information on the project, including the proponent's objectives and rationale, their relationship to statutory policies, plans and strategies, including the basis for selecting the proposed project locations and implications of the project not proceeding;
- the project areas and vicinity, supported by plans and maps that show:
  - the extent of Crown and private land, existing and planned land uses and waterways; and
  - the general layout of the proposed quarry and areas of disturbance, including access tracks, stockpiling areas and proposed ancillary infrastructure.
- the proposed operational life of the project and planned timing of project phases;
- other necessary works directly associated with the project, such as road upgrades and/or connections, and infrastructure and services relocation;
- risks associated with projected climate change and resilience to these risks including consideration of the Climate Change Act 2017's principles of risk management and standards for risk assessment;
- a proposed approach to rehabilitation and closure, and a draft rehabilitation plan
- description of the project's components (supported by visuals and diagrams), including:
  - applicable standards and adopted specifications for infrastructure;
  - location, footprint, layout and access arrangements;
  - design of main components and expected staging and scheduling;
  - proposed establishment methods and materials, and extent of areas to be disturbed;
  - details of the proposed operation, including management of topsoil, overburden and rock extraction; blasting, crushing, processing and storage, and expected volumes and production rates;
  - solid waste, wastewater and hazardous or contaminated material generation and management;
  - water sources, demand, extraction and storage, including water balances;
  - identification of proposed transport routes of project components to site, including consideration of upgrades of roads and intersections;
  - rehabilitation of site works areas following construction as well as during decommissioning;
  - proposed tenure arrangements to provide for access for maintenance or other operational purposes;
  - lighting, safety and security requirements and electricity supply and use;
  - hours of work, workforce requirements and description of the expected duration of project components, including which components are temporary and which are permanent.

3.4. Project development and alternatives

The EES is to document the development process for the project, including methods for the identification and evaluation of alternatives, and the basis for selecting the preferred alternative(s) examined in detail within the

EES[11]. The EES needs to describe the process for identification and evaluation of project alternatives, including:

- alternatives considered in the project development and design process;
- methods and environmental criteria for identifying and comparing feasible alternatives, and for selecting preferred alternatives;
- assessment and comparison of the technical feasibility and environmental implications of alternatives, including alternative construction methods;
- the basis for selecting the preferred project layout and design, particularly where the project footprint is located in proximity to areas of environmental significance;
- how avoidance and minimisation of potentially significant impacts has influenced project design, including for, but not limited to, listed threatened species, threatened ecological communities and their habitats; and
- how information gathered during the EES process, including from consultation with stakeholders and Traditional Owner groups, was used to consider alternatives and refine the project.

The EES is to document the assessment of environmental effects of feasible alternatives, particularly where these offer a potential to avoid and/or minimise significant environmental effects whilst meeting the objectives of the project. In doing so, the assessment of environmental effects of relevant feasible alternatives (e.g. project layouts, refinements and designs) needs to address the matters set out in section 4 of these scoping requirements, as appropriate.

The depth of investigation of alternatives should be proportionate to their potential to avoid or minimise potentially significant adverse effects while still meeting project objectives.

3.5. Applicable legislation, policies and strategies

In addition to the Environment Effects Act, the EES will need to identify relevant legislation, policies, guidelines and standards, and assess their specific requirements or implications for the project, particularly in relation to required approvals.

The proponent will also need to identify and address any other relevant strategies, subordinate legislation and related management or planning processes, including Traditional Owner Country Plans, that are relevant to the assessment of potential effects of the project.

3.6. Environmental management framework

Effective management of environmental performance during project design, construction, operation and decommissioning is required to meet statutory requirements, achieve environmental outcomes, protect environmental values and sustain stakeholder confidence. Hence, the proposed environmental management framework (EMF) in the EES should describe a transparent governance framework with clear accountabilities for complying with approvals and managing and monitoring the environmental effects and risks associated with all project phases.

The EMF will set the scope for later development and review of environmental management plans for all project phases. The entities responsible for development, approval, implementation and review of environmental management plans should be specified, including relevant consultation requirements.

The EMF should reference or address the source baseline environmental conditions against which the evaluation of the residual environmental effects of the project will occur, as well as the efficacy of applied environmental management and contingency measures.

[11] The assessment of alternatives does not include evaluating alternatives to the project (such as other forms of energy generation), but rather alternatives for the project which would allow project objectives to be met.

The framework should include:

- regulatory context and required approvals and consents, including any anticipated requirements for related environmental management plans, whether for project phases or elements;
- environmental management system to be adopted;
- organisational responsibilities and accountabilities for environmental management;
- an approach to environmental risk assessment and management;
- change management process;
- compilation of environmental management measures proposed in the EES;
- environmental incident management;
- arrangements for management of, and access to, baseline and monitoring data, to ensure transparency and accountability and to contribute to the improvement of environmental knowledge; and
- a proposed monitoring program including monitoring objectives, indicators and requirements (e.g. parameters, standards, methods, locations and frequency), trigger levels and adaptive management responses and reporting process.
- community consultation and engagement practices;
- complaints recording and resolution;
- emergency preparedness and response planning;
- auditing and public reporting of performance, including compliance with relevant statutory conditions and standards and;
- review of the effectiveness of mitigation measures and continuous improvement.

Certain aspects requiring assessment in the EES will have limited influence on project outcomes or risk profile, or require assessment primarily due to their relevance or implications for key statutory approval decisions (see other matters in Table 1). In these cases, well established legislation, policy or standard practice provides the management framework for these environmental effects of the project. Mitigation and management of these aspects should be included within the EMF in the form consistent with statutory approvals.

4. Assessment of specific environmental effects

Preparation of the EES and the necessary investigation of potential effects should be proportionate to the environmental risks posed by the project, as outlined in the Ministerial Guidelines (p. 23). Adopting a systems and risk-based approach to the design and depth of each of the EES studies ensures that a greater level of effort is focused on investigating and managing issues posing higher risk of adverse environmental effects, whereas approaches to examining potential impacts and issues that pose a lower level of environmental risk should involve less depth and effort. Some matters with minimal risk won't need to be analysed and can be addressed in the EES through environmental management.

The EES needs to put forward a sound rationale for the level of assessment and analysis undertaken for potential environmental effects or combination of effects arising from the project. The EES should also address any other significant issues that emerge during the investigations.

Scoping requirements do not set the specific approaches or methods to be adopted by a proponent for investigating different effects for their EES. These scoping requirements do, however, provide clarity on the risk-based approach to environmental assessment for the EES, and what the potentially significant effects and priority themes for investigations are. This helps the proponent tailor their approach to concentrate primarily on the potentially significant effects and priority themes, which are most important for an adequate EES and subsequent decision-making. This scope identifies the issues for each theme for investigation to be assessed through the application of the general approach for assessment outlined in Section 3.1.

The Minister's published reasons for decision requiring the EES (Appendix A) articulates the rationale for the EES, including key matters and potentially significant effects that need to be examined. This, in combination with key statutory decision-making known for the project, establishes a framework that informs the necessary scope, depth, and desired outcomes of the assessment of environmental effects via the EES. The scope of specific environmental matters needing to be investigated and documented within the EES are set out below in the subsequent sections.

Categorisation of themes in Table 1 has been informed by the Minister's decision and reasons, information provided by the proponent through the EES referral and proposed EES study program, feedback from agencies on the TRG and assessment by DTP.

In some cases, there will be other matters that are important for assessment in the EES primarily due to their relevance or implications for key statutory approval decisions, rather than a potentially significant effect. While these matters may not directly connect or overlap with potentially significant effects, they could be important considerations for the integrated assessment of effects that will inform key statutory approval decisions, as noted in Table 1.

Table 1: Investigation themes, potentially significant effects and key statutory decision-making known for the project

Categorisation and theme	Minister's reasons for decision	Relevant statutory decisions and associated legislation
High priority		
Native vegetation and biodiversity values	Potential effects on native vegetation and biodiversity values, including listed threatened species and communities under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*	Planning approval under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* Approval under *EPBC Act*

Categorisation and theme	Minister's reasons for decision	Relevant statutory decisions and associated legislation
		Permits under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and *Wildlife Act 1975* Approval under the *MRSD Act*
Groundwater, including Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems, Surface water	Potential effects on surface water and groundwater, including groundwater dependent ecosystems	Permit or consents under the *Water Act 1987* An A18 permit under the *Environment Protection Regulations 2021* Permits under the *Environment Protection Act 2017* Approval under the *EPBC Act* Approval under the *MRSD Act*
Priority		
Aboriginal cultural heritage	Potential effects on Aboriginal cultural heritage values	Approval of Cultural Heritage Management Plan under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.
Traffic, transport and roads	Potential effects on traffic and safety, from heavy vehicles movements to and from the site	Consents or agreements under *Road Management Act 2004* to undertake works in, on or under a road Planning approval under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
Air quality, noise and vibration	Potential effects on amenity (air, noise and vibration)	Approval under the *MRSD Act*
Geotechnical matters and rehabilitation		Approval under the *MRSD Act*
Other matters		
Historic heritage	Potential effects on historic heritage values	Permits or Consents for works to Victorian Heritage Register places, Victorian Heritage Inventory sites or historical archaeological sites, under the *Heritage Act 2017*

Categorisation and theme	Minister's reasons for decision	Relevant statutory decisions and associated legislation
Community, economic and land use	Potential effects on landscape and community values	Planning approval under Planning and Environment Act 1987 Approval under the *MRSD Act*
Landscape and visual amenity	Potential effects on landscape and community values	Approval under the *MRSD Act*
Bushfire		Planning approval under *Planning and Environment Act 1987.*

4.1. High priority matters

This section describes the key issues for the high priority themes identified in Table 1.

4.1.1. Native vegetation and biodiversity values

Native vegetation and biodiversity values are a high priority for technical investigation due to potential for disturbance and significant effects to native vegetation, habitat values and associated threatened and listed species and communities under the Commonwealth EPBC Act and state FFG Act.

Key issues

- Direct loss and degradation of native vegetation and associated listed ecological communities, including those listed as threatened under the EPBC Act and the FFG Act.
- Loss, degradation or fragmentation of habitat for flora and fauna species and communities including those listed under the EPBC Act and the FFG Act.
- Disturbance and/or degradation of adjacent or nearby habitat that may support listed species or other protected flora, fauna or ecological communities.
- Disruption to fauna movement between areas of habitat across the broader landscape.
- Indirect effects on biodiversity values of the project, such as edge effects, surface hydrological changes, groundwater drawdown, dust deposition, introduction or spread of weeds and pathogens, or other disturbance impacts such as noise, vibration, light and traffic.
- The availability of suitable offsets for the loss of native vegetation and habitat for relevant species under the FFG Act and EPBC Act
- Cumulative impacts on biodiversity values due to existing threats and approved land uses at the local, landscape and regional scale.
- The potential risks of the impacts listed above being exacerbated by the effects of climate change.

4.1.2. Groundwater, including groundwater dependent ecosystems, and surface water

Surface water and groundwater are priority technical investigations due to potential effects on water environmental values, including potential impacts on groundwater-dependent and aquatic ecosystems.

Key issues

- Potential impacts on environmental values of surface water nearby and downstream of the project site arising from interception of flows, disruption to existing sedimentation and erosion or from discharges

from operational areas or other areas disturbed by project works, in the context of projected climate change over the anticipated duration of the project.
- Potential impacts on environmental values of groundwater including groundwater dependent ecosystems due to flow interception, drawdown, or dewatering considering proposed extraction depth (quarry designed so extraction of material will not intercept the Loddon Valley groundwater system), volume and duration.
- Potential impacts on listed threatened species, ecological communities and associated habitat that may arise from changes in groundwater regimes, hydroperiods, surface water availability or quality.
- Potential impacts on aquatic ecosystems and ecological health of surface waters nearby and downstream of the project site due to project activities.

4.2. Priority matters

This section describes the key issues for the priority themes identified in Table 1.

4.2.1. Aboriginal cultural heritage

Aboriginal cultural heritage is a priority for investigation due to the potential for physical disturbance and significant effects on tangible and intangible Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Key issues

- Potential direct or indirect impacts on, or loss of, tangible or intangible Aboriginal cultural heritage associated with the project area and surrounds.
- Identification of areas of known Aboriginal cultural heritage, and model areas with the potential to contain Aboriginal cultural heritage, and any known or previously unidentified intangible Aboriginal cultural heritage associated with the project area.
- Meaningful engagement with the registered Aboriginal party, the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, having regard to *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018* to determine extent, nature and significance of any Aboriginal places, both tangible and intangible, or areas where Aboriginal cultural heritage is likely to be present.
- Protection and preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, where opportunities are available, in partnership with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation.
- Implementation of management and contingency measures, in accordance with the requirements for a Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

4.2.2. Air quality, noise and vibration

Air quality and noise and vibration are a priority for technical investigation due to potential significant effects to amenity and wellbeing for residents and other relevant sensitive receptors (including conservation and recreation spaces) that may be sensitive to these amenity impacts at all stages of the project due to exposure to dust, air pollution, noise, and vibration from quarrying activities and transport of materials.

Key issues

Protect health and wellbeing of residents, and local communities, through avoiding and minimising effects on air quality, noise and vibration

4.2.3. Traffic, transport and roads

Traffic, transport and roads is a priority for technical investigation due to potential frequency of transport of quarry materials potentially affecting the local transport network and its users.

Key issues

- Potential impacts from project-related traffic, including potential surface and/or structural damage to public roads caused by additional heavy vehicle movements.
- Consideration of amenity, accessibility and road safety impacts on nearby sensitive receptors including residents, townships and local transport network users; including during seasonal peaks.

4.2.4. Geotechnical matters and rehabilitation

Geotechnical matters, rehabilitation and approach to post closure are priorities for technical investigation to ensure the return of disturbed land to a safe, stable and sustainable condition to an agreed end use.

Key issues

- Changes in topography, groundwater conditions, drainage and vegetation cover.
- Adequate rehabilitation of the project site to enable sound post-closure uses, including stability of rehabilitated landforms, surface water management, revegetation and ongoing weed control.
- Potential for long-term landform degradation with regard to slope geometry, rock and soil properties, vegetation cover, surface drainage, erosion and climate change considerations.

4.3. Other matters

The other matters presented in Table 1 are relevant for risk-based examination and/or assessment in the EES, primarily because they have localised effects and/or because they are relevant to, or have implications for, statutory approval decisions, rather than potentially significant effects (see Section 4). The effort apportioned to understand and assess the other matters should be risk-based, to inform key statutory approval decisions, as appropriate.

These matters, should they be confirmed as low risk, could be considered largely through environmental management (i.e. within the proposed EMF described in Section 3.6) as they are more likely to cause only localised impacts during construction and operation. The EMF in the EES would need to set out how such potential adverse effects will be avoided, minimised or mitigated.

Appendix A Procedures and Requirements

Procedures and requirements under section 88(5) of the Environment Effects Act 1978

The procedures and requirements applying to the EES, in accordance with both section 8B(5) of the Act and the *Ministerial guidelines for assessment of environmental effects under the Environment Effects Act 1978* (Ministerial Guidelines), are as follows:

(i) The EES is to document investigations of potential environmental effects of the proposed project, including the feasible alternatives and associated avoidance and environmental mitigation and management measures, in particular for:

a. native vegetation and associated biodiversity values, including listed threatened species and communities, such as through loss, degradation or fragmentation of habitat or through other indirect causes, as well as related ecological effects;
b. surface water and groundwater and associated values (e.g. groundwater dependent ecosystems) from the project, such as excavation, dewatering and offsite discharges;
c. Aboriginal cultural heritage and historic heritage values;
d. traffic and safety, from vehicles movements to and from the site on the public road system, and any associated road safety implications; and
e. amenity (air, noise and vibration), landscape and community values.

(ii) The matters to be investigated and documented in the EES will be set out more fully in scoping requirements. Draft scoping requirements will be exhibited for 15 business days, before final scoping requirements are issued by the Minister for Planning

(iii) The proponent is to prepare and submit to the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) an adequate draft EES study program to inform the preparation of scoping requirements.

(iv) The level of detail of investigation for the EES studies should be consistent with the approach set out in the scoping requirements and be adequate to inform an assessment of the significance and acceptability of its potential environmental effects, in the context of the Ministerial Guidelines.

(v) DTP will convene an inter-agency technical reference group (TRG) to advise DTP and the proponent on the scoping requirements, the design and adequacy of the EES studies, and coordination with statutory approval processes.

(vi) The proponent is to prepare and submit to DTP its proposed EES Consultation Plan for engaging with the public and stakeholders during the preparation of the EES. Once completed to the satisfaction of DTP, the EES Consultation Plan is to be implemented by the proponent, having regard to advice from DTP and the TRG.

(vii) The proponent is also to prepare and submit to DTP its proposed schedule for the completion of studies, preparation and exhibition of the EES, following preparation of the scoping requirements. This schedule will be finalised in consultation with DTP and is intended to facilitate the alignment of the proponent's and DTP's timeframes, including for TRG review of technical studies and main report.

(viii) The proponent is to apply appropriate peer review and quality management procedures to enable the completion of EES studies and documentation to a satisfactory standard.

(ix) The EES is to be exhibited for a period of 30 business days for public comment, unless the exhibition period spans the Christmas-New Year period, in which case 40 business days will apply.

(x) An inquiry will be appointed under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* to consider environmental effects of the proposal.


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