ESG Aspects of Tailings Management in Australia: Aligning Global Standards with National Regulation

K.Vershinina1, L.Rollin2 and H.Thompson3

Note: Presenting author’s name should be underlined.

1.Principal Consultant (ESG), SRK Consulting, Brisbane QLD. Email: kvershinina@srk.au.com

2.Senior Consultant (ESG), SRK Consulting, Perth, WA. Email: lrollin@srk.au.com

3.Principal Consultant, SRK Consulting, Perth, WA. Email: hthomson@srk.au.com

Keywords: ESG, Tailings Management, International Standards

# ABSTRACT

The mining industry, both in Australia and globally, strives to minimize risks associated with mine project development, with tailings management being a key area of public and regulatory scrutiny. While compliance with national legislation governing the design, operation, and closure of tailings storage facilities is mandatory, leading international best practices extend beyond regulatory requirements to ensure the highest standards of safety, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility. Numerous global and Australian mining companies elect to follow international practices to enhance and strengthen their management approaches, reduce reputational risks, and improve relationships with stakeholders. The International Council of Mining and Metals (ICMM) Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management (GISTM) and the Towards Sustainable Mining Tailings Management Protocol (TSM TMP) are internationally recognized frameworks that guide best practices in Australia.

GISTM was developed as a global benchmark for tailings governance, while the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA), in collaboration with the Mining Association of Canada (MAC), has adapted and adopted MAC’s TSM TMP to align with the Australian mining context. Although both ICMM and Canadian TSM are currently collaborating on the Consolidated Mining Standard Initiative—which aims to merge various voluntary responsible mining standards into one global standard—the new consolidated standard continues to refer to both tailings management frameworks as the preferable management tools. Both frameworks share a common objective—minimizing risk and enhancing accountability—while addressing key environmental, social, governance (ESG), and technical aspects of tailings management. However, mining companies often face the challenge of complying with both standards concurrently, as differences in structure, implementation, and reporting requirements add complexity. Given that regulatory compliance remains obligatory, understanding the synergies and distinctions between these frameworks and national regulations is essential to streamline compliance efforts, reduce duplication, and enhance operational efficiency.

This article presents a comparative analysis of the ESG components of GISTM and TSM TMP, assessing their alignment with state regulatory requirements. The findings have been applied to multiple project assessments, leading to the development of targeted action plans for compliance, with the case studies discussed in the article.