

# Community attitudes on mine rehabilitation of open-cut coal mines in regional New South Wales

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## ABSTRACT

The mining industry's contribution to regional economies is undeniable. At the same time, mining often introduces environmental and social impacts that are felt directly by surrounding communities. Mine rehabilitation is undertaken to minimise environmental impacts, is a compliance obligation, and demonstrates the social performance of mining companies (Weyer et al, 2017). It is widely accepted that community engagement on mine rehabilitation outcomes is needed to ensure acceptance and successful transition to post-mining land uses (Larance, 2012; Everingham et al 2018; Owen and Kemp, 2018). However, there appears to be little research available on community perceptions on mine rehabilitation.

The aim of our research was to investigate public attitudes on mine rehabilitation of open-cut coal mines in regional New South Wales (NSW). Focus groups were conducted with members of the public and mining stakeholders of directly affected communities (Mudgee) and a regional urban centre (Dubbo), to explore public perceptions about mine rehabilitation and subsequent land uses.

Our paper distils the outcomes of these focus groups. While local residents recognised the economic contribution of coal mining to the region, they expressed concerns that mine rehabilitation decisions are not sufficiently transparent. Successful mine rehabilitation was often defined in terms of aesthetics although it was acknowledged this is difficult to quantify. While it was generally preferred to reinstate the land use prior to mining, it was conceded by some, this might not be practical and therefore prefer a land-use that derives an income to at least pay for on-going land management. Participants identified that mined lands could be used for a range of potential post-mining land uses, including renewable energy generation and providing recreational opportunities. This information will be useful to support decision and policymaking and may improve community engagement processes around mine rehabilitation planning.

**Keywords:** *community engagement; mine rehabilitation; post-mining land-use; decision making; focus group*

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