

The new social license: Leadership in an era of regulatory change and stakeholder complexity

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ABSTRACT

Australia's minerals sector is entering a period in which project success is increasingly determined by organisational capability rather than technical capability alone. Recent legal challenges to major resource developments, including the forthcoming High Court decision concerning Mount Pleasant, highlight growing uncertainty within state and commonwealth planning and approvals frameworks and raise important questions about how mining organisations should adapt to an era of heightened stakeholder scrutiny.

This research examines how contemporary governance, stakeholder engagement and social licence influence the approval and delivery of major mining projects. Through analysis of recent Australian case studies, legislative reforms and emerging policy settings, the research explores whether current approaches adequately balance environmental protection, Indigenous rights, community expectations, investor confidence, and Australia's strategic role in supplying energy and critical minerals to both domestic and global markets.

Preliminary findings suggest that future-ready mining organisations will require a broader model of leadership in which social licence, transparent governance and stakeholder accountability are treated as strategic operational capabilities rather than compliance obligations. As Australia simultaneously phases down thermal coal while accelerating development of critical minerals under an evolving policy framework, organisational resilience will increasingly depend upon leaders who can navigate legal uncertainty, competing stakeholder expectations, and rapidly changing geopolitical conditions.

The research proposes a leadership framework that integrates technical excellence with proactive governance and collaborative stakeholder engagement, aiming to improve project certainty while strengthening public trust. Rather than framing resource development as a choice between economic growth and environmental responsibility, the paper argues that Australia's long-term competitiveness will depend upon mining organisations capable of delivering both.