

A social licence to close: engaging stakeholders in agreeing post-mining land uses

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ABSTRACT

Without appropriate transfer to subsequent use, areas of post-mining land may remain vacant, unable to be used productively. Policies and processes that optimize rehabilitation and post-mining land use planning are critical in assisting regional economies to avoid post-mining decline and transition to a viable post-mining future. This paper proposes a role for stakeholders in closure planning and agreeing on a beneficial re-purposing of the land. This is one of the four goals of mine rehabilitation and closure specified by various mining regulators, including those in Queensland, Australia. Engaging with stakeholders including indigenous people, government agencies, community organisations, and private landowners to obtain input on the proposed land use options increases the likelihood of an effective and acceptable closure plan. However, such planning must occur within the bounds of predicted land capability/suitability and company capacity to implement the post closure land use plan. Although current guidelines require stakeholder consultation, there is little evidence that rehabilitation and closure planning processes incorporate the perceptions of a range of local and regional stakeholders, including potential future land users, about the utility of ex-mining leases, their socio-economic value and associated opportunities and risks.

This paper reports research that modelled a potential role for stakeholders in the context of Central Queensland's Bowen Basin coal region. The qualitative study used a series of stakeholder workshops to consider the opportunities and barriers for various future uses especially incorporating ex-mine land into grazing properties as the prevailing land use in the region and common pre-mining function. Few jurisdictions have a clear process for involving key stakeholders in planning rehabilitation and closure and negotiating the transfer of mining lands to socially acceptable uses after mine closure. The findings of this study relate to the opportunities and risks perceived by stakeholders, as well as the characteristics of a suitable engagement process.