Applying GISTM to Closed Facilities: Challenges and Solutions

Gimber C1, McKay H2

1.Partner, ERM, Brisbane QLD 4000. chris.gimber@erm.com

2.Technical Director, ERM, Brisbane QLD 4000. heather.mckay@erm.com

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# ABSTRACT

The Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management (GISTM) establishes a globally applicable framework for effective tailings management and governance across all stages of the facility lifecycle. Many organisations have chosen to implement GISTM across their portfolios, which often include a mix of planned, operational, and closed facilities. Applying GISTM to closed or legacy assets presents unique challenges, which are the focus of this paper.

One of the key challenges that emerge for closed facilities is that there are often knowledge gaps in the design or construction practices. Commonly, the corporate knowledge that once existed has been lost through the passage of time. Also the design or construction practices that were employed often do not meet today’s minimum standards, resulting in technical, environmental and social risks, despite complying with legal and regulatory obligations of the time. A particularly complex issue arises when regulatory authorities are satisfied with the existing risk profile and are reluctant to authorise further work, yet 'safe closure,' as defined by GISTM, has not been fully achieved.

As commonly identified, towards the end of the facility lifecycle, the number of options reduce and costs increase, at a time when the mining operation is not income generating. How should this be addressed when trying to bring facilities into alignment with GISTM, especially where facilities are remote and on-site presence is reduced? How should ALARP be interpreted in the context of closed facilities, and what precedent has been set around the world for application of GISTM to legacy facilities?

This paper consolidates insights and lessons learned from multiple closed facilities to provide guidance on addressing these complex questions and the practical application of GISTM to legacy sites.