

Understanding the social and political stakeholder environment of contemporary and future mining: delivering tools for navigating multiple perspectives

CRC ORE Project Report P4-010

Summary Report

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INVENT



INTEGRATE



IMPLEMENT



INTRODUCE

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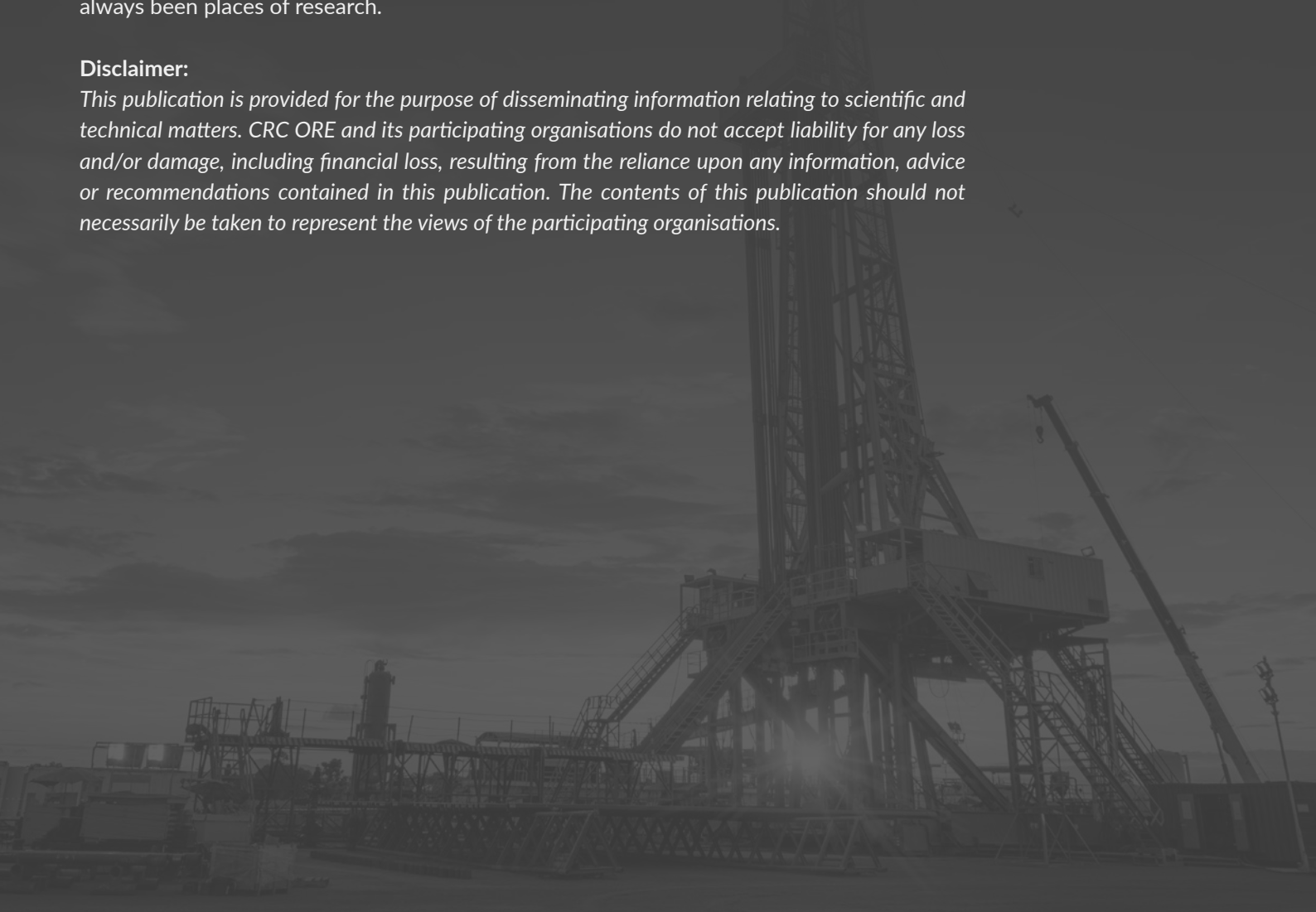
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As a Queensland University of Technology (QUT) based research team, we acknowledge the Turrbal and Yugara, as the First Nations owners of the lands where QUT now stands. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge that these lands have always been places of research.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This Summary Report presents key findings from a 2020-21 research project addressing CRC ORE's Program 4 emphasis on understanding and managing the complex network of stakeholders whose internal drivers and interactions potentially impact social licence to operate (SLO).

In 2018-2020, Ernst and Young identified SLO as the number one risk for mining and metals, noting an evolving stakeholder landscape along with increasing stakeholder capacities and influence. Understanding this current and future dynamic environment is crucial to making informed decisions, avoiding costly disruption to mineral extraction, and maximising the benefits of mining for all.

1.1 WHY THIS RESEARCH?

Understanding the dynamics of the stakeholder social and political environment is crucial to:

- making informed, socially accepted/supported decisions about the development of mining operations;
- avoiding costly disruption to mineral extraction;
- minimising adverse stakeholder impacts;
- co-creation of good mining practice; and
- maximising the benefits of mining for all.



1.2 WHAT WE DID

This research deployed a multi-perspectival approach to understanding stakeholder networks as a means to:

1. Map the drivers and interactions of the multiple stakeholders operating in the Australian mining sector's socio-political environment.
2. Understand stakeholder perceptions and expectations around what might constitute good mining.
3. Develop tools to enable multi-perspective understandings and approaches to improving achievement of a robust social licence.

Our multi-perspectival approach to understanding the socio-political landscape and drivers and interactions of stakeholders focused on the Adani (Bravus¹) Carmichael Coal Mine (CCM) as an empirical exemplar of a mine with complex stakeholder interactions operating across local, state and national scales, and unfolding across time.

In line with the aims, our research questions focused on understanding stakeholder perceptions of:

- the key drivers informing engagement with debate around the CCM;
- the positions and interactions of diverse stakeholders, and importantly,
- what might constitute good mining.

The aims and research questions were addressed across three stages undertaken with the approval of the QUT ethics committee (Approval Number 2000000218).



Stage 1 involved substantive desktop identification, collation and analysis of public documents, submissions, and news & social media, to identify social and political drivers of key mining stakeholder groups involved in debate around the CCM.



Stage 2 centred on the conduct and analysis of 42 semi-structured interviews with identified stakeholders active in the CCM case. Interviewees were asked for their personal perspectives and experiences as opposed to speaking on behalf of official stakeholders and groups. Participants were asked about what 'good mining' would look like and if they could think of any tools that might be useful in achieving good mining. The research team thanks the participants for their generosity in participating, and for the richness of their shared insights.



Stage 3 encompassed the development of tools identified in the research process to distil research learnings and enable nuanced stakeholder navigation of the social and political environment attending mining in Australia.

¹ While Adani Mining changed its name to Bravus Mining and Resources in late 2020, this summary report continues to refer to the company as Adani given that the majority of interviews occurred prior to this name change.



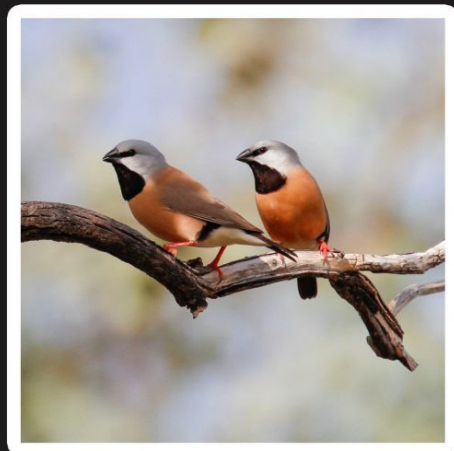
1.3 WHAT WE LEARNED

The contemporary Australian mining social and political environment is characterised by a number of interrelated factors that together work **against efficient, transparent and beneficial stakeholder engagement**:

- mining approval processes are now taking longer;
- Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documents require more information, yet work against transparency;
- court action is expected as matter of course;
- it is becoming harder to get financing and insurance for mining operations in the absence of a SLO;
- stakeholder identities cannot be considered fixed; and
- stakeholder views on specific mining operations and/or the specific sectors of the industry seem to be increasingly polarised in the public sphere
- information deficits and misinformation are perceived by a wide array of stakeholders to undermine transparency needed for open debate and problem solving.

Patterns of stakeholder engagement are complex and demonstrate:

- disruption of business-centric stakeholder engagement, and substantial influence on the part of stakeholders that were not initially identified by the company in the EIS process.
- a dynamic hierarchy of stakeholder drivers in terms of influence and emphasis, and divergences at the regional, state and national levels.
- that process limitations associated with the EIS process play a key role in shaping debate around mining operations.
- a strong perception of the importance of the role of public media in shaping (mis)understandings of mining operations.

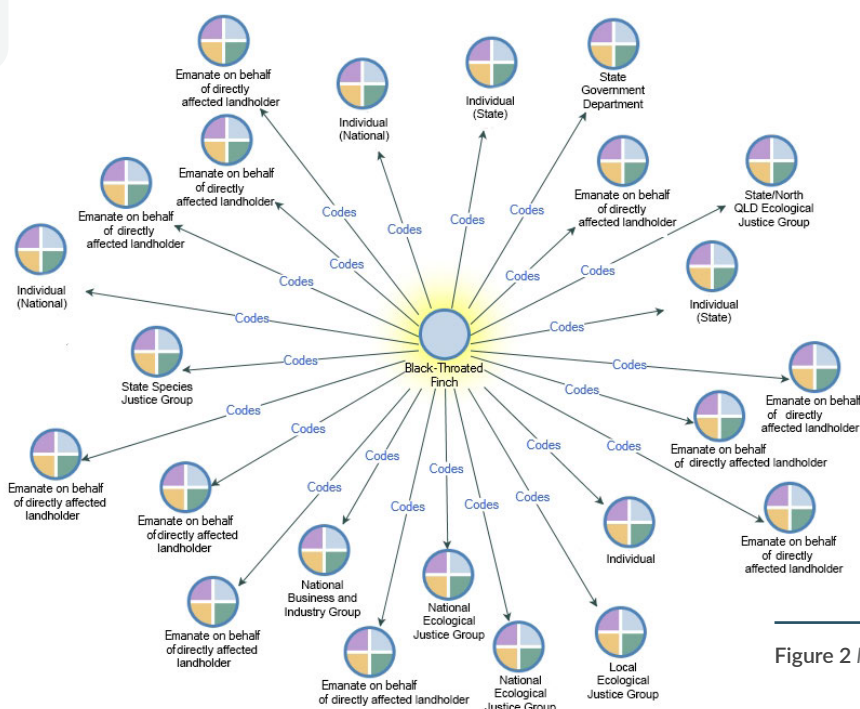


The black-throated finch and its immanent extinction has become a rallying cry for anti-Adani activists. Its image has been used throughout campaign ephemera, prompting a range of responses from concerned citizens through programs such as the Black Finch Project—where the public create artworks depicting the finch and mail them to politicians—to being voted Australia’s Bird of the Year 2019 through the Birdlife Australia and Guardian Australia competition.

The initial concerns over the black-throated finch can be traced back to the EIS submissions, where it is the most frequently referenced endangered nonhuman in relation to the mine site, although there are a number of other animals and plants within the site that are also endangered or vulnerable. As [Figure 1](#) demonstrates, a number of key themes and stakeholders converged on this topic, demonstrating the complexity of the network and interrelations of themes. More specifically, the Black-throated Finch was referenced in relation to five sub-themes noted above: inadequate surveying, loss of habitat and vegetation, cumulative impacts, water, offsets, and coal dust. The key topics that actively overlap with the black-throated finch coding within the EIS include, in descending order: habitat, Galilee Basin projects (other than Adani), inadequate or incorrect surveying, cumulative impacts, Squatter Pigeon, conservation & land clearing, offset strategies, surface water, soil erosion and subsidence, mine and offsite infrastructure, koalas.



Figure 1 *Black-throated finch* word cloud



Mapping the network around the black-throated finch demonstrates the variety and interconnections of stakeholders converging on this species—one that emerges as central to the ongoing debates. As illustrated in the network map (Figure 2), the stakeholders that engaged with the black-throated finch largely consist of Ecological Justice Groups across a range of scales, Directly Affected Landholders, and concerned individuals also from a range of scales. It is also notable that one of the two environmental groups identified by Adani as stakeholders within the EIS is the State Species Justice Group, which indicates that the finch was also recognised by the proponent as a significant issue from the beginning of the extensive approvals process.

Figure 2 Network map related to black-throated finch

Importantly, stakeholder groups appear to have limited communication with people who have **significantly differing views**. Further, there is a **significant and consistently evident mismatch between a given stakeholder group's stated drivers and key issues and external perceptions of the stakeholder group's drivers and key issues** (as summarised below).

CATEGORY OF STAKEHOLDER	STATED DRIVERS & KEY ISSUES	EXTERNAL PERCEPTIONS OF DRIVERS & KEY ISSUES
State Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public servants remain objective and carry out their roles guided by relevant Acts Tensions across departments with competing Acts Lack of experienced personnel for reviewing mining applications Increasing numbers of public submissions compromising decision-making process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viewed by local councils as not understanding its power to dictate terms to the mining industry Viewed by the environmental movement as under thumb of industry, & more concerned with re-election than climate change Viewed by the mining industry as lacking policy direction and a stated position on the future of (coal) mining
Local Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several viewpoints: vocally supportive because of potential profits; pro mining but against this one mine for environmental or engagement reasons; no longer interested in discussing the project. Large difference between local and regional community views. Local towns had no allegiance toward mining industry and did not anticipate any benefits. Regional towns were very supportive of mining but unhappy with FIFO policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viewed by the environmental movement as supportive of the mine because of the promise of jobs. Viewed by industry as supportive of the mine for jobs and regional investment. Industry believes that communities are out to get money from companies. Viewed by government as concerned with specific local impacts such as the quality of access roads.
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited funding for infrastructure and local community resources. Resentment toward the State Government for hoarding royalties. FIFO workers impacting funding, resources and services. Mining companies get no special treatment. No attachment to any one employee or mine. Driven to increase their power through pooling resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viewed by the mining industry as greedy for financial 'handouts' & eager to approve new mines within their boundaries. Industry experts also view them as lacking in environmental knowledge and concern. Viewed by local community as pro-mining, with different levels of negotiating transparency.
Print Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty including opposing viewpoints in reporting Journalists would prefer more extensive and less biased reporting. Loss of nuance in writing based on a shift in audience attention spans and limited budgets. Loss of science writers with the ongoing funding cuts. Understanding that media is perceived by the public as being extremely biased. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ABC and The Guardian Australia viewed by conservative participants as radically left-leaning, but acknowledge the ABC is still producing good and accurate reporting. Conservative participants take issue with the 'targeting' of Adani by the ABC. Newscorp viewed by progressive participants as clearly pro-mining and climate change denying. Multiple participants pointed to the fact that the Courier Mail prints Adani's media releases word for word.

Mining Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older companies (BHP & Anglo) perceived as more trustworthy. • Tier 1 companies are divesting, have the power to pressure industry bodies. • Driven to protect their reputation and financial viability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewed by civil society and industry experts as driven by compliance and legal requirements rather than a code of ethics. • CCM viewed by environmental movement as symbolic of wider coal industry. • CCM viewed by local community as one mine among many & unlikely to impact them.
Environmental movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals are rapid decarbonisation and a transition from fossil fuels to renewables. • Drivers are climate change and preventing the opening of the Galilee Basin to prevent its CO2 emissions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewed by industry as morally 'negligent' for prioritising climate change over energy poverty. • Viewed by pro-Adani and neutral participants as an urban movement, hypocrites for using mined products, ideologically driven, unreasonable and stubborn.

This mismatch hampers the trust and transparency, and open dialogue, central to good mining.

This research demonstrates that questions of power, and relatedly of truth and transparency, are central dimensions of the socio-political landscape and shape stakeholder interrelations.



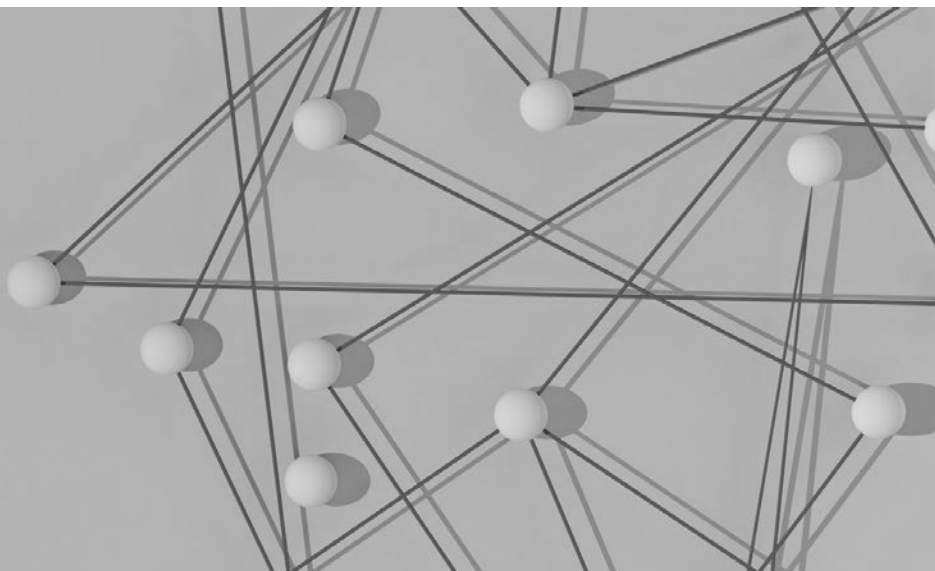
POWER

Interview participants highlighted that power imbalances lie in the influence a mining company might have on a stakeholder to make decisions that stakeholder might not have otherwise made. This power might be exerted through the control of material or financial resources, or through more symbolic forms of power such as drawing out negotiations or limiting opportunities for two-way stakeholder engagement.



TRUTH AND TRANSPARENCY

Almost all community and civil society research participants emphasised the need for high quality independent reviewers and representatives to oversee all aspects of the approvals process.



GOOD MINING

As perceived across the spectrum of stakeholders interviewed, encompasses an **interconnected and dynamic set of best practices involving both industry and government centred on:**

- increase transparency and trust;
- improve engagement;
- accessible information; and
- independent processes and forums to facilitate conversations among stakeholders who may not recognise shared values.

Central to good mining, in the view of almost all community and civil society research participants, is the need for **high quality independent reviewers** and representatives to oversee all aspects of the approvals process and to thus build trust in the information given and decisions made.

Correspondingly, there was a perception from those same categories of participant that mining organisations: (a) are selective in their provision of information to external parties; (b) do not consistently conduct adequate research into areas of importance to a range of stakeholders; and (c) that the independence of external consultants that are currently contracted by companies to conduct additional research and analysis is inherently compromised by their financial attachment to the company.

1.4 TOOLKIT

In response to the research findings, and drawing on the expertise and experiences shared by interviewees, the project delivered a suite of three interconnected tools to enable multi-perspectival understandings and approaches to improving the achievement of SLO (see www.extractivestakeholder.com for each of these tools and further information):

1. Interactive Timeline;
2. ANT Stakeholder Action Planning Tool; and
3. PREDICT Principles of Good Mining.

