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Dear Rebecca

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AUTHORITY SUBMISSION TO JTSI – WA BATTERY AND CRITICAL MINERALS STRATEGY – CONSULTATION

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission regarding the *WA Battery and Critical Mineral's Strategy* (WABCM Strategy).

The Western Australian (WA) Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) is an independent statutory body with responsibility to use its best endeavours to protect the environment. One of the EPA's objectives is to minimise the risk of environmental harm associated with climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible.

To this end, we support decarbonisation as a key objective in protecting WA's environment. The EPA notes that proposals which support decarbonisation goals such as battery and critical mineral projects should occur in conjunction with regional environmental protection frameworks, both of which are of key strategic interest to the EPA.

In WA, any project can be referred by the proponent or a member of the public to the EPA for assessment. We therefore encourage all proponents to ensure that projects fully consider and are aligned with the EPA's environmental factor objectives to facilitate a clear and efficient assessment process. This ensures that battery and critical mineral projects will have fewer technical environmental assessment and management challenges, will have more public acceptance and trust, and can demonstrate key legislation and policy objectives are met.

The EPA advises that significant environmental impacts of battery and critical mineral projects will need to be assessed and mitigated appropriately, as they are for other major projects in WA. In the meantime, the EPA has recently assessed several critical mineral mines and refineries, which have highlighted some key issues and learnings. If the WABCM Strategy can highlight these, this will provide the Government an opportunity to make environmental assessments more efficient while providing greater environmental protection.

These issues and learning opportunities are:

- Proposals should be developed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy, which preferences avoidance of environmental impacts, followed by harm minimisation and management, rehabilitation, and the provision of environmental offsets. The EPA's experience is that proposals which adopt this approach will have fewer technical environmental assessment issues, more public acceptance, and can more easily demonstrate key legislation and policy objectives are met.
- Co-location of proposals and strategic approvals provide opportunities to reduce environmental fragmentation, reduce cumulative impacts, utilise economies of scale and identify industrial synergies and co-benefits. They are also usually consistent with a regional environmental planning framework approach, which upfront identifies key environmental, social and economic values and facilitates environmental planning and decision-making. This provides greater certainty, efficiency and environmental protection.
- Waste minimisation, rehabilitation outcome and life cycle considerations should be considered from proposal design stage. In addition, opportunities for waste to have a beneficial re-use should not be constrained, and opportunities for beneficial re-use should be reviewed throughout project life cycles. Additionally, research and monitoring of rehabilitation outcomes can provide valuable learnings for future projects and strategic environmental restoration and recovery plans.
- Opportunities for offsets programs and conservation areas should be strategically identified. Areas should be set aside, and programs identified to ensure net environmental benefits for regions likely to have significant critical minerals, particularly in areas with high biodiversity. Offsets can provide the EPA with satisfaction that a proposal will be consistent with its objectives, in a way that cannot be achieved if all high biodiversity areas are considered prospective.
- Staging of projects can be a key tool to manage project development, social and economic needs as well as be consistent with an adaptive management approach to environmental protection.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely



Prof. Matthew Tonts
CHAIR, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AUTHORITY

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