

Summary of reasons for decision – request to amend a referred proposal under s. 38C of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*

Proposal title: Arrowsmith Central Silica Sand Project

Environment Online Reference Number: N/A

Date request to amend referred proposal under s. 38C received: 16-05-2022

Proponent: VRX Silica Limited

Proposal referral date: 10-09-2021

Existing referred proposal:

The Proponent proposes to develop a high-grade silica sand mine in the Geraldton Sandplain bioregion of WA, approximately 260 km north of Perth.

The proposal would include a total disturbance of 333 hectare (ha) of native vegetation within a 1569 ha development envelope. Vegetation and topsoil would be relocated to progressively rehabilitate areas using a Vegetation Direct Transfer method (VDT).

Clearing for infrastructure and access during the life of the proposal is to be no more than 30 ha at any given time (excluding rehabilitation areas).

Mining is proposed to occur in blocks (150m x 150m), with up to five blocks being mined each year. The life of the Proposal is estimated to be 30 years.

Groundwater abstraction from the Yarragadee aquifer of 0.9 GL to facilitate construction activities.

An on-site gas fired power station capable of up to 5MW production is included to power operations.

Short description of amendment sought:

The Proponent proposes to amend the proposal as follows:

- A 973 ha reduction in the total extent of the development envelope; from 1569 to 596 ha.
- Splitting the development envelope into two separate development envelopes; a 559 ha Mine and Southern Access development envelope and a 37 ha Northern Access development envelope.
- One ha increase in clearing extent of native vegetation; to a total of 334 ha.
- Five ha increase the total extent of cleared land at any one time (from 30 hectares to 35 hectares).
- Inclusion of the Superficial Swan aquifer as an option for groundwater abstraction (no change to total groundwater abstraction).

Decision:

Amendment to the proposal as set out in attachment 1 is approved

Relevant considerations

1. Is there sufficient information about the proposed amendment to be able to make a decision whether to assess the proposal as amended? **Yes**
2. Is there sufficient information about the proposed amendment to be able to decide the level of assessment? **Yes**
3. Will the amended proposal still be substantially the same character as the existing referred proposal? **Yes**
4. Should the amended proposal be re-advertised for public comment?. **The amended referral will be advertised for 7-day public comment to inform the Level of Assessment decision.**

Environmental factors and values relevant to amendment:

- Flora and Vegetation: clearing of native vegetation
- Terrestrial fauna: loss of habitat for conservation significant fauna
- Inland waters: impacts to groundwater from abstraction
- Social Surroundings: potential impacts to Aboriginal Heritage values

Summary of likely changes to environmental impacts from proposed amendment

Amendment sought	Changes to environmental impacts
<p>A reduction in the development envelope:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in size by 973 ha 	<p>The proposed change does not alter the key environmental factors likely to be impacted by the proposal (vegetation and flora, terrestrial fauna, inland waters and social surroundings), which will be considered in the EPA's decision on whether or not to assess the proposal.</p> <p>This change is likely to provide greater certainty about the impacts, and location of impacts. The modified development envelope (DE) is located entirely within the original DE. Therefore, there are no likely changes to environmental outcomes or consistency with EPA objectives.</p>
<p>Increase of clearing extent by up to 1 ha</p>	<p>The proposed change does not alter the key environmental factors likely to be impacted by the proposal, which will be considered in the EPA's decision on whether or not to assess the proposal.</p> <p>This change may result in a small increase in impacts to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flora and Vegetation - Terrestrial Fauna - Social Surroundings <p>The modified DE is located entirely within the original DE. Environmental outcomes or consistency with EPA objectives are unlikely to change.</p>

<p>Potential abstraction from the Superficial aquifer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Up to 0.9 GL 	<p>The proposed change does not alter the key environmental factors likely to be impacted by the proposal which will be considered in the EPA's decision on whether or not to assess the proposal.</p> <p>The proponent has identified an option to abstract from the Swan superficial aquifer and/or Yarragadee aquifer. The abstraction rate is unchanged.</p> <p>Environmental outcomes or consistency with EPA objectives are unlikely to change.</p>
<p>Splitting of development envelope into a Northern Access development envelope and a Mine and Southern Access development envelope</p>	<p>The proposed change does not alter the key environmental factors likely to be impacted by the proposal, which will be considered in the EPA's decision on whether or not to assess the proposal.</p> <p>The two development envelopes fall within the original development envelope contained in the proposal.</p> <p>Environmental outcomes and consistency with EPA objectives will likely be unchanged.</p>
<p>Increase in permanent clearing extent by up to 5 ha at any given time.</p>	<p>The proposed change does not alter the key environmental factors likely to be impacted by the proposal, which will be considered in the EPA's decision on whether or not to assess the proposal.</p> <p>The proponent has proposed that vegetation and topsoil would be relocated to progressively rehabilitate areas using a Vegetation Direct Transfer method (VDT). The addition of the northern access road means that an additional 5 ha would be cleared at any one time.</p> <p>Environmental outcomes or consistency with EPA objectives are unlikely to change.</p>

Summary of consultation, and advice from other decision-makers

VRX Silica has had pre-referral meetings with DAWE and EPA Services, Industry Regulation and Water Licencing at the DWER, and consulted with Local, State and Commonwealth Governments, Aboriginal Groups connected to the proposal and corporate and community stakeholders.

Summary of recommendation

The EPA considers the amended proposal to be substantially the same character as the existing referred proposal and does not consider that the amendment would be a significant amendment if the proposal were already approved. The EPA considers it has enough information to reasonably proceed to make decisions about assessment without a new referral being submitted.



Prof. Matthew Tonts

CHAIR

Delegate of the Environmental Protection Authority

Date: 30 May 2022

Attachment 1

Proposal Content Document (PCD) VRX Silica Limited Arrowsmith Central Silica Sands Project