


NOTICE OF DECISION AND STATEMENT OF REASONS

Section 56 of the *Environment Protection Act 2019* (EP Act)
Regulations 174 and 175 - Environment Protection Regulations 2020 (EP Regulations) for a decision on a significant variation

Name of proposed action	Winchelsea Island Manganese Mine Project (proposal)
Proponent	Winchelsea Mining Pty Ltd
NT EPA reference	EP2021/004 - Significant variation accepted 24 May 2021
Description of proposed action	To construct and operate an open cut manganese mine at Winchelsea Island (Akwamburkba), north of Groote Eylandt, about 600 km southeast of Darwin. The proposal involves the mining of manganese and the use of a conveyor to transport processed ore to a barge-loading facility, and then trans-shipping of ore.
Nature of the significant variation	Key changes to the proposal include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction of mining activity (shorter life of mine and smaller mineral lease, reduced disturbance area, number of pits, mining rate and workforce) • removal of proposal components including the accommodation village, jetty extension, wharf, and solar array • change to processing method from beneficiation to crushing and screening • change from direct loading to trans-shipping of ore.
Decision on significant variation	In accordance with EP regulation 173(1)(c)(ii), the assessment can continue with the existing assessment method (environmental impact statement) with amended terms of reference.
Person authorised to make decision	Dr Paul Vogel AM – Chairperson, as delegate of the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA)
Signature	
Date of decision	10 August 2021
Matters considered	EP Regulation 172 and 173(6): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the accepted notice of significant variation • additional information given to the NT EPA under EP Regulation 164 • whether the variation would change the potential for, or extent of, significant environmental impacts already identified for the proposal • the objects of the EP Act and the purpose of the environmental impact assessment process • submissions received in relation to the significant variation during the public consultation period 1 June to 29 June 2021 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ government authority submissions received: 10

- public submissions received: 1
 - EP Regulation 59.
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Consultation Public and government authority submissions identified that the potential for a significant environmental impact remains with regard to the quality of land and soils, the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater resources, the quality and processes of marine, terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, biosecurity risks, communities, the economy and human health. Submissions recognised that knowledge gaps remain about the development of mine components, water supply, geochemical properties of mine waste, transshipment location, closure planning, and rehabilitation. Issues about impacts on an uninhabited island and cumulative impacts with existing and future developments on Groote Eylandt were also raised.

STATEMENT OF REASONS

Overview

The NT EPA recognises that the changes proposed in the notice of significant variation may reduce the overall environmental impact of the proposal. However, there is the potential to have a significant impact on environmental values associated with the 13 [environmental factors](#) previously identified in the NT EPA's [Notice of Decision and Statement of Reasons](#) of 10 March 2021.

Justification

The assessment can continue with the existing assessment method because the:

- Regulation 172(2)(a) potential for a significant impact on the environment does not differ in a material way from the impacts already identified in the assessment process
 - Regulation 172(2)(b) significant variation will not result in a substantial change to the type or amount of any output of the proposal in a way that significantly changes the potential significant impacts from those already identified in the assessment process
 - Regulation 172(2)(c) matters raised in the significant variation do not remove the potential for significant environmental impact. A decision to continue with the existing assessment method is consistent with the objects of the EP Act and purpose set out in section 42 of the EP Act.
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Conclusion

The NT EPA considers that the significant variation does not reduce the potential for the proposal to have a significant impact on environmental factors due to the location, scale and extent of the proposal. The uncertainty regarding the values that may be impacted by some components of the proposal, and the magnitude of those impacts, remain due to the preliminary nature of the information available. Management and mitigation measures proposed in the design, planning, construction and operational phases of the proposal require further development during preparation of an environmental impact statement, with consideration of environmental values identified through studies and stakeholder engagement. The NT EPA considers that the assessment can continue to assess the proposal and significant variation within the environmental impact statement process.
