

## FOR A MORE TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE MINING SECTOR

# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS

**Before a mining company is given an approval to mine, it must conduct a thorough assessment of the environmental and social impact its mining operations might cause. The environmental impact statement produced by this assessment is crucial for government decision-making. But how accurate are these statements? Who writes them and how are they verified?**

An environmental impact statement (EIS) is a document that outlines the social, economic and environmental impacts of an activity such as mining. The EIS is crucial for governments looking to make informed decisions about whether or not to give a mining project the green light. It forms the basis of any protections (or conditions) designed to reduce negative impacts on the environment and communities. It is also a vitally important process for communities as it is often the only way they can gain an understanding of what will happen on or near their land and the potential impacts of those activities.

Environmental, social, cultural and economic risks arise if the individuals responsible for the EIS do not have the appropriate experience and qualifications to conduct a robust assessment. Risks are higher if no one is independently verifying the models, systems and data used to produce the technical reports within an EIS. These elements can create the potential for unethical conduct to occur and heightens the risk of:

- environmental and social impacts not being effectively assessed,
- approval conditions being based on incorrect assessments, and
- management plans not adequately mitigating or rehabilitating negative impacts.

Accountability within the environmental impact assessment process can be increased and risks reduced through:

- ensuring that environmental impact assessors have the appropriate qualifications and experience to conduct the assessments (see our [Guide to Stronger Environmental Impact Statements](#) to learn more about how a certification requirement can achieve this),
- Independent verification of modelling systems and technical reports for high-risk impacts, and
- Increasing the transparency of the environmental impact assessment process to the public (see our [EIS process map](#) to learn about the process for large mining projects in Queensland).

**An environmental impact statement (EIS)** is a critical document relied upon to inform assessment of, and decision-making for, mining projects. They are the responsibility of a mining company, which will often employ consultants to complete them. An EIS can contain assessments of the environmental, economic, social, and cumulative effects of a project and can include complex modelling and data to assess impacts in areas such as groundwater, dust, and biodiversity.

## CORRUPTION RISK

Transparency International defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Corruption risks are weaknesses in the process that could enable corruption to occur.

Corruption is more likely to arise when:

- There is inadequate review and verification of the modelling systems, theories and data used in a company's EIS
- There are no professional or ethical standards that environmental impact assessors are independently accountable to
- Public consultation on the EIS is not mandatory
- Rules for community engagement are not clear and consultation only occurs with local elites
- The EIS is not publicly available or accessible

This can lead to:

- Inaccuracies or modelling in the EIS that may minimise negative impacts to increase the likelihood of a project being approved
- Ineffective assessment of environmental and social impacts and inadequate approval conditions and management plans
- Poor outcomes for the environment and communities

## WHY WE NEED A BETTER EIS PROCESS

If an EIS lacks rigour, omits critical information, contains false or misleading information, or fails to assess project hazards effectively, government decision-makers will not have the information they require to make a suitable decision on whether a mining project should proceed or not on environmental grounds. This information is not just for governments – members of the public also have a right to access this information and express their concerns about a mining project. Mining companies are required to consult with the community, share information and respond to their concerns. If the community does not have clear and accurate information, they will not be able to participate in a meaningful way in a consultation.

For further detail on strengthening the transparency and accountability within the EIS process for large infrastructure mines (coordinated projects) in Queensland see our [Environmental Impact Statement Process Map, Coordinated Mining Projects, Queensland.](#)

For further detail on strengthening the accountability of environmental impact statements see our publication [When Mining Gets the Green Light: a guide to stronger environmental impact statements.](#)