



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF GEOSCIENTISTS VICTORIAN BRANCH COMMITTEE

Parliamentary Inquiry into Greenfields Exploration and Project Development in Victoria

The Australian Institute of Geoscientists, (AIG), is a national organisation representing over 2500 geoscientists across all disciplines of the earth sciences, including hydrogeology, environmental geology and engineering geology, however the majority of members are employed in exploration and mining within Australia.

The AIG regards this inquiry to be of vital importance to its members who work in Victoria and in the interest of all members in that the removal of impediments and the promotion of exploration will lead to an active and successful mining industry in the state offering employment opportunities for its members and for the state as well increased financial and community benefits to the community in general.

The Victorian Branch of the AIG would like to make the following submission to the inquiry

Prospectivity and Endowment

The mineral endowment and prospectivity of Victoria has been shown to be as richly endowed with minerals as other parts of Australia by the work of Geoscience Victoria and its predecessor the Geological Survey of Victoria (GSV).

The types of mineral deposits that occur are controlled by the geological terrain. As is well known the geology of the central part of the state hosts gold deposits, the Gippsland area is favourable for coal and for each geological environment specific mineral deposits may be found.

Large areas of the bedrock of the state are covered by overlying rocks which have hidden the mineral potential of these areas. Developments of exploration techniques with the increasing application of technology particularly in the fields of geochemistry and geophysics have enabled the identification of potential sites of mineralization. This march of progress will only continue with the possibility of areas currently regarded as unprospective being found to host mineralisation.

Prospectivity also has an economic component, the demand for minerals changes over time for many different reasons. The price of oil is an obvious example and also today the price of gold is at record levels whereas a decade ago it was languishing near its historic lows. This applies to nearly all minerals and it is imperative for the future of the state that maintenance of the supply of scientific information relating to all minerals found in the state is maintained in order to be able to take advantage of a boom in any of those minerals.

The history of mineral discovery is the application of new ideas, technology or theories to historical data and areas, in many cases to areas which have been dismissed by previous work.

Regulatory Environment

Members of the AIG often work in a consulting or contracting role for exploration and mining companies in Victoria, managing or working on exploration programs. There have been numerous complaints, stories and anecdotes about time taken to gain approval to carry out work in the state. For example, delays to the approval process meaning the summer field season in eastern Victoria was over before any work could be carried out.

The work plan system requires consultation between government agencies and departments and while there are agreements between them and timeframes set for the approval process there have been numerous instances of the approvals taking until the “last minute” before being approved or simply taking longer than the time allocated.

The process needs to be streamlined in some form or become the sole function of one of the approval bodies that then has to take responsibility for meeting time commitments. Feedback to the applicants is also required as organization of exploration programs cannot be done while there is an indeterminate time of receiving permission to carry out work.

Much of the delay is caused by the placing of prescriptive conditions on work which also restrict the flexibility of the explorer in carrying out the work. Emphasis on the “outcomes”, particularly with the environment of the area after the work is completed should be regarded as more important than the prescribing of methods in which the work is carried out would be a means of removing these delays.

The staffing of the relevant bodies with a sufficient number of experienced people would also result less delays as often junior or inexperienced government are asked to make decisions which they are unable to make and therefore have to refer back to their superiors. A commitment to improve staff numbers, their retention and training at the regulatory agencies which deal with the industry is crucial in improving the regulatory process as well as improving the perception of standards in the eyes of industry.

Perception of Victoria

There is a diversity of opinion amongst members of the organization which ranges from despair at the regulatory and operating environment, because “there are too many people, too many parks, too much bureaucracy”, through to the recognition of the potential for undiscovered mineral deposits, particularly gold in central Victoria and northern Victoria and base metals in the east and the west of the state.

Government Roles and Land Use

The role of government in supporting is many fold but two of the main points to focus on are the provision of state-wide geological data on a scale beyond the scope of individual explorers and the storage and dissemination of historical mining and exploration data, and the promotion of the industry throughout the community.

The GSV have done excellent work in recent years with the gold undercover project, the VIMP program, the Rediscover Victoria drilling programs and the extensive seismic surveys through the west and central parts of the state to investigate the underlying geological structure of the state, the host rocks types and the mineral depositional environments.

This work has led to the extensive mineral sands mining in the north west of the state and to the discovery of the new deposits undercover in the north of the state at Tandarra, Mitiamo and Lockington.

The development of a computer simulated 3- Dimensional model of the state is one the important developments it has undertaken. As more information becomes included into the model this will become an even more powerful tool for interpreting geology and locating areas of potential mineralising systems. This technology is widespread throughout the world and it is important that the state maintains this important exploration tool.

The GSV should be supported with sufficient funding and manpower to continue this work and continue to apply new technology in pursuit of the data related to mineral formation and deposition.

The role of government in promoting the industry is currently at the forefront of industry government relations. The benefits to the state of income derived through royalties and taxes as well as direct employment through support industries is fundamental to the success of exploration and mining projects a well informed community can appreciate the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved and prevents the misleading or biased information influencing public opinion.

The concept of multiple land uses and enables all land uses to be reconciled. The exploration of land occur with no or minimal disturbance to the land surface, the action of mining and then rehabilitation of land then allow it to be returned to its former or alternative uses . The economic cycle mean that mineral deposit may be mined several times as the economics and technology changes over time. The multiple land use scheme allows this to happen.

An active program of promoting the value to the state and community of the extraction of minerals and the responsibilities of government and industry, carried out through the schools curriculums and to the general public through regular advertising campaigns is role which should undertaken by government.

On Behalf of the Victorian Committee

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