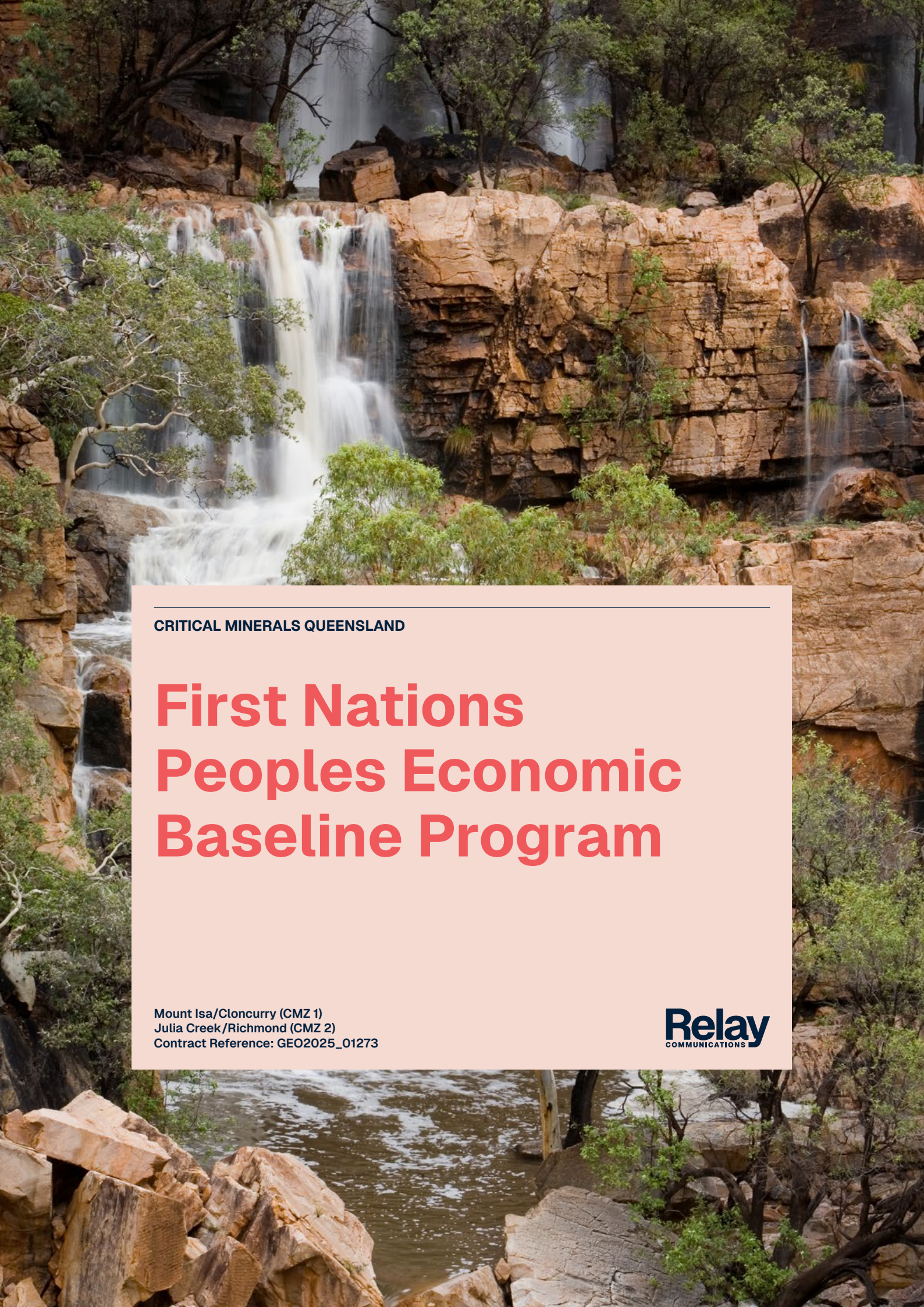




CRITICAL MINERALS QUEENSLAND

First Nations Peoples Economic Baseline Program

Mount Isa/Cloncurry (CMZ 1)
Julia Creek/Richmond (CMZ 2)
Contract Reference: GEO2025_01273

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Disclaimer. This report has been prepared by Relay Communications Pty Ltd for Critical Minerals Queensland for the purposes described herein. It draws on community engagement and publicly available secondary data, and is subject to the limitations set out at Section 1.6. It does not constitute legal advice, a Social Impact Assessment, or Native Title consultation or agreement-making.

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Acknowledgement of First Nations Peoples

Relay Communications acknowledges the First Nations Peoples of the Critical Minerals Zones, and their enduring connection to the lands, waters and skies of North West Queensland.

We recognise the Traditional Owner groups whose Country lies within these zones — including the Wanamara, Mitakoodi and Mayi, Yulluna, Kalkadoon, Waluwarra, Waanyi and Indjalandji-Dhadhanu Peoples — together with all First Nations Peoples who hold cultural connection to this Country, whether or not that connection has been formally determined.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the knowledge holders who have cared for this Country for tens of thousands of years and continue to do so today. We acknowledge that cultural authority, law and custom endure, and that the economic aspirations recorded in this report rest on a far older and deeper relationship between First Nations Peoples and their Country.

This Program was made possible by the First Nations Peoples who generously shared their time, knowledge and perspectives. We thank them, and we recognise that the voices captured here belong to the communities who gave them.

Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope

This First Nations Peoples Economic Baseline Program, prepared by Relay Communications for Critical Minerals Queensland (CMQ), provides a community-driven evidence base on First Nations economic participation across Queensland's two priority Critical Minerals Zones — Mount Isa/Cloncurry (CMZ 1) and Julia Creek/Richmond (CMZ 2). It delivers the evidence base required under the Program scope: culturally authorised engagement across the Traditional Owner groups connected to both zones, a profiled stakeholder and enterprise landscape, and findings mapped to the Office of the Coordinator-General's (OCG) Social Impact Assessment (SIA) framework.

- Designed as a proponent-ready resource — a shared, zone-level baseline proponents can draw on to help meet engagement and SIA obligations, rather than commissioning the same engagement independently — while not displacing project-specific engagement or the requirements of applicable legislation.
- Intended to reduce duplication, shorten assessment timeframes, and lessen the engagement burden on communities.
- Scope defined by cultural connection and economic stake — engaging First Nations Peoples connected to the zones, not only determined native title holders.
- Qualitative and thematic in purpose; it identifies consistently raised issues, and is not a statistical survey (see Section 1.6).

Key Baseline Findings

The baseline shows a clear demographic and economic profile across the two zones:

- First Nations Peoples make up over a fifth of the Mount Isa (21.5%) and Cloncurry (23.8%) populations in CMZ 1.
- CMZ 2 (McKinlay and Richmond) includes a substantial pipeline of proposed critical minerals development, but has small, ageing communities with small resident First Nations populations, and a resource workforce that is overwhelmingly non-resident (FIFO).
- The resource workforce is overwhelmingly non-resident, and engagement raised concerns that the economic benefits of development are not consistently retained locally. Further economic assessment — expenditure flows and employment multipliers — would quantify how much value stays in the region.
- First Nations workers are concentrated in non-resource industries.
- Relevant First Nations enterprises are real but under-recognised, and distributed regionally — so single-locality supplier searches understate the available capability.
- A significant education gap exists on what critical minerals development actually involves — across both First Nations communities and the broader community. In the absence of clear, targeted information, assumptions form (such as an expectation of strip mining) and trust erodes before formal engagement begins. Closing this gap is a precondition for effective engagement and participation (Sections 7.4, 8.1).

Key Opportunities

Engagement identified consistent opportunities well beyond operational mining roles:

- On-country enterprise — biodiversity, land and water management, ranger work, revegetation and rehabilitation.
- Pastoral and grazing participation; cultural enterprise in art, storytelling, tourism and advisory services.
- Entrepreneurship and international intertribal trade; targeted skilled and professional pathways.
- A recurring model: the Traditional Owner-governed enterprise (for example a biodiversity company holding authority over methodology), delivering services proponents require rather than supplying labour — aligned with proponents' environmental and cultural-heritage needs.

Key Risks and Constraints

The constraints are structural rather than a reflection of capability or willingness:

- FIFO recruitment that draws labour from outside the region and overlooks local people.
- Workplace culture in which belonging, not aptitude, is the barrier; and little support to sustain employment once gained.
- The difficulty and cost of establishing and running the corporations and trusts through which First Nations Groups participate commercially.
- Procurement that awards small, short packages while larger contracts go elsewhere.
- Out-migration to regional hubs that draws skills and leadership away from communities.
- A distinction participants drew between social impact and cultural impact — the latter not fully captured by an SIA.

Key Implications

The interpretation of these findings, with indicative confidence levels, is set out at Section 9. In summary:

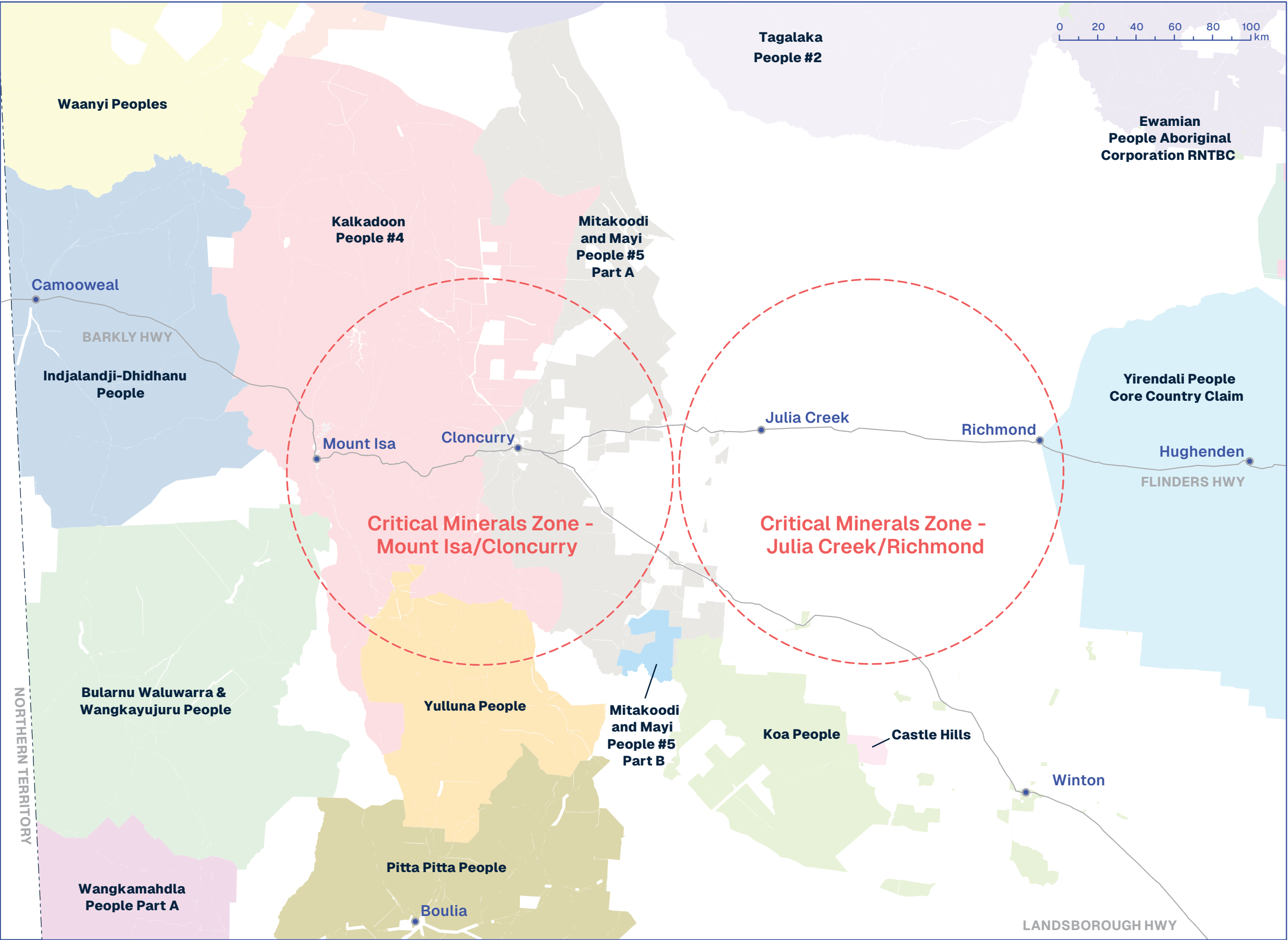
- The central challenge appears to be connecting existing First Nations capacity to opportunity, rather than building capacity assumed to be absent.
- Participation is unlikely to occur by default; local-first recruitment, retention support and procurement structured to grow businesses would need to be deliberate.
- Opportunity extends well beyond operational mining roles, into on-country and Traditional Owner-governed enterprise aligned with proponents' own needs.
- Enduring contracts and trust structures appear preferred over grants and one-off arrangements.
- Engagement legitimacy rests on reaching all Traditional Owners, including those living away from country, and recognising cultural authority.

Priority Actions (12–36 months)

Engagement indicated that proponents would benefit from acting ahead of project ramp-up:

- Draw on this baseline and a possible common engagement framework in project planning; engage all Traditional Owners, and meet people where they live.
- Identify First Nations suppliers regionally and engage them early; design procurement to grow businesses.
- Begin accredited training aligned to real roles ahead of construction.
- Apply the SSRC Act recruitment hierarchy with local-first recruitment and retention support.
- Support Traditional Owner enterprise and capacity-building; establish enduring engagement and benefit structures.





Critical Minerals Zone Map

The zones shown are indicative study areas defined for research purposes, not administrative, tenure or determination boundaries.

Native title claims and determinations appear for orientation only and are not a legal record.

Findings presented in this report relate to groups and communities within these zones and should not be generalised beyond them.



01 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Context

This First Nations Peoples Economic Baseline Program has been prepared by Relay Communications for Critical Minerals Queensland (CMQ), within the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development.

It provides a community-driven evidence base on First Nations economic participation across Queensland's two priority Critical Minerals Zones (CMZs): Mount Isa/Cloncurry (CMZ 1) and Julia Creek/Richmond (CMZ 2).

It is designed to support meaningful First Nations participation in the economic opportunities generated by that growth — through employment, enterprise, procurement and training.

THE PROGRAM'S PURPOSE IS TO:

- deliver a culturally grounded, evidence-based account of current First Nations economic participation across the CMZs, drawing on both community engagement and secondary data;
- identify the opportunities, barriers and aspirations that shape First Nations participation in the critical minerals sector;
- record the supports that First Nations Peoples identify as necessary from government and industry, and the outcomes to be avoided; and
- function as a proponent-ready reference that provides a more informed starting point for engagement and supports efficient, good-faith social impact assessment.

1.2 Relationship to the Social Baseline Study (EMM, 2025)

This Program complements and extends the Julia Creek/Richmond Critical Minerals Zone Social Baseline Study prepared by EMM Consulting for the Department (July 2025). The EMM study established a social baseline and cumulative assessment framework across the five key matters of the Coordinator-General's Social Impact Assessment (SIA) Guideline, profiling communities and modelling development scenarios for the CMZ.

The EMM study recorded that, despite repeated attempts across March, April and June 2025, its engagement with First Nations stakeholders on project-related matters was limited, and that it did not identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses listed on the major directories for the immediate CMZ 2 localities. This Program is the deliberate response to that gap. While the EMM study provides the broad social baseline, this Program adds the culturally safe First Nations economic engagement needed to fill the evidence gap. It shows regional First Nations enterprise capability beyond what a single-locality directory search can capture, giving stakeholders clearer, more reliable evidence for their assessments.

1.3 Critical Minerals Strategy and CMZ Framework

Critical minerals underpin the technologies required for global decarbonisation and the energy transition — copper for electrical infrastructure, vanadium for grid-scale energy storage, and cobalt, nickel, zinc and rare earth elements for batteries and advanced manufacturing. Global demand for these minerals is forecast to grow substantially through the 2030s, driven by electric vehicle manufacturing, grid storage and transmission upgrades, renewable generation, and data-centre infrastructure.

To focus that effort, Critical Minerals Queensland delivers its work through designated Critical Minerals Zones (CMZs) — areas where clusters of co-located projects and initiatives allow government support to be concentrated. This Program covers the two priority zones:

CMZ 1 — MOUNT ISA/CLONCURRY

Anchored in the North West Minerals Province, one of the world's richest mineral-producing regions, this zone is centred on secondary processing and the recovery of critical minerals from existing operations and tailings. Mount Isa is a long-established mining and minerals-processing centre whose copper operations are in transition, with the region's copper smelting and refining future the subject of significant government attention — including a joint Commonwealth–Queensland support package and a transformation study examining the region's copper value chain. This transition is part of what makes critical-minerals diversification, and First Nations participation in it, a timely priority. The zone covers the Mount Isa and Cloncurry local government areas.

CMZ 2 — JULIA CREEK/RICHMOND

This zone takes a targeted, coordinated approach to growing Queensland's vanadium industry. It encompasses the McKinlay and Richmond Shire local government areas, where up to nine proposed vanadium projects could create as many as 1,740 construction jobs and 1,697 operational jobs at full development, alongside two existing operating mines. Projects range from approved and under construction (Saint Elmo Vanadium) through to those preparing Environmental Impact Statements and earlier exploration-stage deposits.

The CMZ framework is deliberately designed so that shared, zone-wide baseline studies — covering social, water and environmental matters — are available to all proponents and stakeholders, helping reduce costs and approval timeframes, and helping build capacity for regional growth. This Program is the First Nations economic component of that shared evidence package.

1.4 Regulatory Context (SSRC Act, OCG SIA Guideline July 2025)

This Program is aligned with, but distinct from, the statutory social impact assessment framework. The Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Act 2017 (Qld) ensures that residents of communities near large resource projects benefit from those projects, and most projects in the CMZs are likely to meet the Act's large-resource-project threshold. The Coordinator-General's SIA Guideline (July 2025) sets out five key matters that proponents must address: community and stakeholder engagement; workforce management; housing and accommodation; local business and industry procurement; and health and community well-being.

This Program does not itself constitute an SIA. Rather, it produces a First Nations economic evidence base that maps onto those five key matters (see Section 10), so that proponents can re-use it to help meet their own engagement and assessment obligations.

1.5 How This Report Can Be Used by Proponents and Stakeholders

This Program is intended to function as a proponent- and stakeholder-ready assessment tool. Mining proponents operating in the CMZs are required to engage with affected communities and assess social impacts as part of their Environmental Impact Statement and Social Impact Assessment obligations. First Nations Peoples connected to the CMZs are central to those obligations, yet engagement with them is often frequent but poorly coordinated, exposing communities to repeated, overlapping consultation and the fatigue that follows.

By establishing a shared First Nations economic baseline at the zone level, this Program allows proponents and stakeholders to:

- draw on a documented, culturally validated account of First Nations economic aspirations, barriers and supports across the zone, rather than commissioning that engagement independently;
- understand the cultural authority structures, protocols and stakeholder landscape relevant to their project area before making contact;
- align their own assessment and benefit-sharing commitments with the preferred outcomes and outcomes to be avoided that First Nations Peoples have identified; and
- map their engagement directly to the five SIA key matters through the crosswalk provided in Section 10. The crosswalk exists so that engagement evidence gathered once, under cultural authority, can be traced directly to each SIA requirement — supporting assessment efficiency and a transparent evidence lineage.

Used this way, the Program reduces duplication and shortens assessment timeframes. It also lessens the engagement burden carried by communities and raises the quality and consistency of the First Nations evidence proponents rely on. It does not replace project-specific engagement where a proponent's activities directly affect a particular group, but it provides the foundation on which that engagement can build.

1.6 Report Limitations and Appropriate Use

This Program presents a qualitative, community-driven economic baseline. Its findings should be read with the following limitations in mind:

- **Not statistically representative.** Participants were selected purposively to capture a diverse and culturally appropriate range of perspectives. Findings indicate patterns and themes; they cannot be generalised to all First Nations Peoples in the CMZs or read as a statistical survey.
- **Cultural diversity across groups.** Multiple Traditional Owner groups, with distinct histories, governance structures and perspectives, are connected to the CMZs. General themes should not be taken to override the specific position of any individual group, which must be confirmed through direct engagement.
- **Not a substitute for project-specific engagement.** This baseline supports, but does not relinquish, the need for proponents to undertake project-specific engagement, and it does not displace legislative or regulatory requirements.
- **Point in time.** The baseline reflects conditions and views recorded during the engagement period in 2026. Community circumstances, Native Title determinations and the development pipeline will continue to change.

- **Secondary data constraints.** Quantitative baseline data draws substantially on ABS Census sources, in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are consistently under-counted, reducing reliability for these populations. Non-resident workforce effects further complicate regional figures.
- **Researcher positioning.** The Program’s Principal Consultant is non-Indigenous. This is deliberately offset by First Nations-led facilitation and cultural authority guidance throughout the engagement, analysis and review.
- **Not a substitute for statutory process.** This Program is not itself a Social Impact Assessment, nor does it constitute Native Title consultation, negotiation or agreement-making. It informs those processes; it does not replace them.

The purpose of this Program is not statistical representation but thematic understanding of the issues consistently raised through culturally appropriate engagement. Its findings should be read on that basis.

All engagement underpinning this Program was voluntary and conducted in accordance with ethical research standards and the Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld), with findings reported in a de-identified form.





02 Methodology

This Program applies a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative primary engagement with quantitative secondary data. The design recognises that understanding First Nations economic aspirations, barriers and opportunities requires both the depth of culturally grounded conversation and the breadth of statistical measurement.

Community and stakeholder engagement is central to every phase, ensuring local knowledge and cultural authority inform the analysis and the interpretation of baseline conditions.

The methodology is informed by the Coordinator-General’s SIA Guideline (July 2025) and the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020), and adopts a convergent parallel design in which qualitative and quantitative data are gathered concurrently and integrated during analysis.

2.1 Engagement Approach and Cultural Protocols

The engagement approach is predominantly oral and conversational, reflecting the communication preferences of many First Nations communities across the CMZs. It rests on respect for cultural protocols and the principle of self-determination, and works through recognised cultural authority structures — Traditional Owner groups, Prescribed Body Corporates, Elders and nominated community representatives.

Engagement was First Nations-led, facilitated by Lee Smallwood and Ben Gertz, with initial contact made through recognised authority structures rather than direct cold approach. Engagement was delivered through a mix of methods matched to context: one-on-one interviews with Elders, PBC representatives, business owners and community leaders; yarning circles in culturally safe settings; open community sessions at accessible venues; and opportunistic informal discussions arising during field visits.

Cultural obligations took precedence over the Program schedule at all times. A documented Cultural Protocol Response Framework governed the team’s response to Sorry Business, ceremony, and gendered business — including immediate suspension of activities in an affected community, notification of CMQ, and rescheduling only on clearance from community representatives. No individual was placed under any pressure to participate during cultural business, and the nature of cultural business was never documented or questioned.

2.2 Scope of Engagement

The scope of engagement is defined by cultural connection and economic stake in the CMZs — not by native title determination status. Engagement therefore extended to all First Nations Peoples connected to the zones, whether or not Native Title has been determined for the relevant Country. This

is an engagement program in its own right: it is not a native title process, and participation neither depends on, nor affects, any determination. Cultural authority exists under Traditional Owner groups’ own law and is held independently of formal legal recognition, and groups with determined native title, registered claims, and common-law connection were accordingly all within scope, on equal footing.

Engagement spanned the principal communities of the two zones — Mount Isa, Cloncurry, Dajarra, Julia Creek and Richmond — and the Traditional Owner groups, residents, businesses, workforce and community organisations connected to them. Engagement was structured across two phases: Phase A in CMZ 1 (Mount Isa/Cloncurry) and Phase B in CMZ 2 (Julia Creek/Richmond). Participants were selected purposively across the stakeholder categories defined in Section 3, to capture a culturally appropriate diversity of perspectives rather than a statistically representative sample.

2.3 Data Sources and Limitations

The Program draws on two complementary streams of data, collected concurrently and brought together at analysis.

Primary (qualitative) sources comprise the interviews, yarning circles and community sessions described above. These capture economic aspirations, barriers, preferences and the cultural considerations that shape economic decision-making — depth that secondary data cannot reach.

Secondary (quantitative) sources establish baseline metrics and demographic patterns, and contextualise the engagement findings. They include the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Census, population and business counts); the National Indigenous Australians Agency; the National Native Title Tribunal registers; Australian Government labour-market data; and First Nations business directories including Supply Nation and Black Business Finder. The EMM Social Baseline Study (2025) is drawn on as an established secondary source for the CMZ 2 social baseline.

Both streams carry limitations. ABS Census data is point-in-time and is known to under-count

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, reducing reliability for these populations; non-resident workforce effects further distort regional figures. The qualitative findings are indicative of patterns and themes, not statistically generalisable. These and other constraints are set out in full at Section 1.6.

2.4 Analytical Framework

Primary qualitative data was analysed using a six-phase thematic analysis, adapted for cultural context: familiarisation with transcripts and field notes; initial coding of relevant data segments; generation of candidate themes across the Program’s thematic domains (economic aspirations; skills and readiness; barriers; supports needed; outcomes not wanted; governance and decision-making); review of themes against the dataset; definition and naming of themes; and synthesis into a narrative supported by de-identified evidence.

Where appropriate, sentiment was noted — distinguishing supportive, neutral/uncertain and concerned responses — to capture both what participants said and the strength with which those views were held. This helped to prioritise areas of strong community support and to flag barriers and historical concerns.

Qualitative and quantitative findings were then integrated through structured synthesis, identifying where they converge (mutual reinforcement), complement (context and explanation), diverge (prompting closer examination), or expand on one another. Trustworthiness was managed against the established criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability — supported by triangulation across sources, member checking with community representatives, a documented audit trail, reflexivity about researcher positioning, and independent review by Castle Hill Advisory.

2.5 Privacy, Consent and Data Governance

All data collection complied with the Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld) and the confidentiality

requirements of the contract. Informed consent was obtained before any data was collected; participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time without reason. Audio or video recording occurred only with separate, explicit consent, was used solely for internal transcription and accuracy, and was never reproduced in any deliverable or public-facing material.

Data was stored securely with access restricted to authorised project personnel, and personal identifiers were removed before analysis. Findings are reported in aggregate — by location (LGA) and by stakeholder category — with illustrative quotes attributed to a category (for example, “Elder, Mount Isa”) rather than to an individual. Culturally sensitive content received special handling in line with participants’ instructions, and all content was reviewed for cultural sensitivity before publication.

2.6 First Nations Data Sovereignty Considerations

Beyond statutory privacy compliance, the Program was conducted in a manner consistent with the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty — the right of First Nations Peoples to exercise control over data about their communities, peoples and Country. In practice this meant: participants retained control over what they shared and how it was used; culturally restricted knowledge was not recorded where participants so directed; cultural authority guided what could be represented and how; and the engagement was led and validated by First Nations facilitators.

The intent is that First Nations Peoples see their perspectives captured and represented faithfully and on their own terms. Consistent with the AIATSIS Code of Ethics (2020), the Program treats community knowledge as belonging to the community, and positions this report as a shared resource that reflects — rather than appropriates — the voices of those who contributed to it.



03 Stakeholder Profile

This section profiles the First Nations stakeholders connected to the two Critical Minerals Zones. Profiling drew on the Program’s Stakeholder Register, developed through desktop research and validated in the field, and informed the design and sequencing of the engagement program.

Consistent with the scope, stakeholders were identified on the basis of cultural connection and economic stake — not legal determination — so the profile spans determined Native Title holders, claimant groups, and groups whose Country remains undetermined but whose cultural authority is recognised.

A foundational principle of this profile is that cultural authority structures across the CMZs are not uniform. Several groups carry internal divisions, contested boundaries, or histories of external administration that shape how engagement must be approached. These realities are recorded here not as judgements but as practical guidance for proponents, who should understand the landscape before commencing engagement.

3.1 Traditional Owner Groups and PBCs

The CMZs intersect the Country of numerous First Nations groups. The principal Traditional Owner groups and their representative bodies are profiled below.

- **Kalkadoon People** — represented by the Kalkadoon Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (Mount Isa), holding the Kalkadoon People #4 determination (QCD2011/007, ~37,592 km²). Kalkadoon Country is central to the Mount Isa area and extends into the north-west of the McKinlay LGA. The Corporation is the formal point of engagement, with a sitting board of directors.
- **Mitakoodi and Mayi People** — represented by the Mitakoodi and Mayi Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, following determination of the #5 Part A claim (QCD2024/013, ~16,859 km²) in August 2024, with the #5 Claim (QC2015/009, ~698 km²) still active. Mitakoodi and Mayi Country overlaps the Cloncurry and McKinlay Shires. The NTAC is the single point of contact for engagement; the Corporation’s legal representation provides guidance where claimants engage outside the NTAC process.
- **Indjalandji-Dhadhanu People** — represented by the Indjalandji-Dhadhanu Native Title Aboriginal Corporation. Their Country covers a large area to the west, north and south of Mount Isa, extending into the Northern Territory and centred on Camooweal. The group is notable for its established commercial activity (see 3.3).
- **Waanyi People** — represented by the Waanyi Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (office in Cairns). The Corporation was previously in ORIC administration for approximately two years, and notable conflicts exist between family groups within the broader Waanyi group — a factor requiring careful, well-briefed engagement.

- **Yulluna People** — represented by the Yulluna Aboriginal Corporation (Cloncurry), holding a determination (QCD2014/008, ~9,878 km²) covering Country to the south-west of Cloncurry. An ongoing boundary issue exists with the Mitakoodi and Mayi NTAC over some contested Country.
- **Wanamara People (Richmond)** — Wanamara Country is not determined, but a historically recognised contact person represents the group. Their inclusion illustrates the Program’s scope principle: cultural authority and economic stake, not determination status, define who is in scope.
- **Waluwarra People and the BWWAC** — the Balarnu Waluwarra Wangkayujuru Aboriginal Corporation (BWWAC) represents Country south of Mount Isa around the Dajarra region (not extending to Boulia, which is Pitta Pitta Country). The BWWAC was in ORIC administration for a period, and divisions exist between individuals and family groups. Separately, some Waluwarra common-law holders in the Dajarra area identify outside the BWWAC and dispute its representation of that Country. Engagement in this area requires particular sensitivity to these internal dynamics.



3.3 First Nations Businesses and Enterprises

A central purpose of this Program is to understand the existing First Nations enterprise base — actual trading enterprises, as distinct from representative or governance bodies. While a search confined to the immediate CMZ 2 localities returns few results, a regional search across Mount Isa and North West Queensland identifies a number of registered and certified First Nations enterprises in sectors relevant to the critical minerals supply chain, including civil construction, mining services and workforce supply. This points to the importance of identifying trading enterprises at a regional scale and through direct engagement, rather than relying on a single-locality directory search.

The most prominent example identified through engagement is Myuma Pty Ltd, a First Nations enterprise associated with the Indjalandji-Dhadhanu people and based at Camooweal. Myuma operates an established commercial business that has included civil and road-maintenance contracts in the region, and runs a well-regarded training operation linking work experience to accredited qualifications. Myuma demonstrates both the viability of First Nations enterprise in the region and a working model of training-linked commercial operation. Its activities, and those of other trading enterprises and PBC commercial arms, are based on desktop verification and engagement to date, and should be confirmed directly with the enterprises concerned before being relied upon. Participants engaged through the Program held a range of positions across community and business: some operate companies holding contracts within the region, while others hold community or governance roles without a current trading operation. Direct engagement with established trading enterprises was accordingly limited, and the regional enterprise picture presented here is indicative rather than a verified capability register — a distinction proponents should preserve when moving from this baseline to procurement.



Note: a number of these groups carry contested boundaries, internal family divisions, or histories of external administration. These are recorded as engagement considerations only, and do not represent any view by Relay Communications or CMQ on the merits of cultural authority, which rests with the groups themselves.

3.2 First Nations Community Organisations

Beyond Traditional Owner corporations, a network of First Nations community-controlled organisations and relevant government bodies operates across the CMZs and provides service-delivery reach, community intelligence and referral pathways. These include Aboriginal community-controlled health services (such as Gidgee Healing in Mount Isa), the Mitakoodi Elders Council Aboriginal Corporation (Cloncurry), the JCU Murtupuni Centre, and the Queensland Government’s Department dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DWATSIPM), which is represented in Mount Isa and has offered to assist with making contacts. These organisations are profiled as enablers of engagement and as holders of practical knowledge about local economic conditions, rather than as cultural authorities for Country.

3.4 Local Government

Local government is a key stakeholder for First Nations economic participation, as employer, procurer, service provider and planning authority. The CMZs span the Mount Isa City, Cloncurry Shire, McKinlay Shire (Julia Creek) and Richmond Shire (Richmond) councils. These councils are profiled in their economic role; their demographic and economic baselines are detailed in Section 4. Engagement with local government was conducted under CMQ pre-approval, consistent with the Program’s notification protocols.

3.5 Stakeholder Roles and Interests Overview

The stakeholders profiled above hold distinct but overlapping roles in First Nations economic participation. Traditional Owner groups and their PBCs hold cultural authority and, increasingly,

commercial capability through PBC enterprise arms; they are the primary decision-makers on Country-related economic engagement. First Nations businesses hold the practical capability to participate in supply chains and to employ and train local people. Community organisations hold service-delivery reach and the trust relationships through which workforce and training pathways operate. Local government holds procurement, employment and planning levers. Residents, workforce and jobseekers are the ultimate intended beneficiaries of improved economic participation.

Individuals frequently hold several of these roles at once — a Traditional Owner who is also a business owner and an Elder, for example — and the Program treats these overlapping identities as a strength rather than a classification problem. The interest and influence of each stakeholder group, and the priority accorded to engagement with each, are recorded in the Stakeholder Register and summarised in the categorisation framework at Appendix C.





04 Regional Context

Demographic and Economic Baseline (by LGA)

This section profiles the demographic and economic baseline of the local government areas that make up the two Critical Minerals Zones, with a focus on the indicators most relevant to First Nations economic participation.

Figures are drawn from the 2021 ABS Census of Population and Housing, and should be read subject to the limitations at Section 1.6 — in particular, the known under-count of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the point-in-time nature of Census data.

4.1 Mount Isa

Mount Isa is the principal service centre and economic anchor of CMZ 1 and of the broader North West Minerals Province, sitting on the traditional lands of the Kalkadoon people. A regional city with a century-long mining history, it remains a major centre for copper processing in northern Queensland and functions as the base for engagement and services across the north-west. The region is in a period of industrial transition, including changes to the area’s copper mining and processing operations, which is part of the context for this Program.

Mount Isa has one of the most significant First Nations populations of any LGA in the CMZs. At the 2021 Census, 4,020 people identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, representing 21.5% of the city’s population — well above the Queensland figure of 4.6% and the national figure of 3.2%. The great majority identified as Aboriginal (3,749 people), with smaller numbers identifying as Torres Strait Islander or both.

The First Nations population is young and growing. Its median age was 24 years, against a Queensland First Nations median of 23 — and around one-third of the population was aged under 15 (11.8% aged 0–4 and 22.0% aged 5–14). This youthful age profile is a defining feature of the economic baseline: it indicates a large emerging workforce entering its working years over the period in which the critical minerals sector is expected to expand, and it concentrates attention on training, pathways and youth employment.

On the household economic indicators, First Nations households in Mount Isa recorded a median weekly household income of \$1,534, a median weekly rent of \$210, and an average of three people per household across 1,521 First Nations households. These figures sit within a high-cost mining economy in which housing availability and competition with the non-resident workforce are persistent pressures.

Indicator (First Nations)	LGA	Queensland	Australia
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people	4,020	237,303	812,728
Share of total population	21.5%	4.6%	3.2%
Median age	24	23	24
Aged under 15	33.8%	33.7%	32.7%
First Nations households	1,521	—	—
Median weekly household income	\$1,534	\$1,517	—
Median weekly rent	\$210	\$305	—

Overall, Mount Isa combines the largest concentrated First Nations population in the CMZs with the strongest existing industrial base, carrying both the greatest opportunity for First Nations economic participation and the highest stakes if that participation does not eventuate. The young age structure makes workforce readiness and training pathways the defining economic question for this LGA.

Opportunity highlight. A large, young First Nations workforce entering its working years as the sector expands — training pathways, apprenticeships and school-to-work transitions started now convert Mount Isa’s demographic profile into the region’s largest First Nations workforce pipeline.

4.2 Cloncurry

Cloncurry Shire lies east of Mount Isa and is the second principal centre of CMZ 1, sitting on Country connected to the Mitakoodi and Mayi and Yulluna peoples. A historic mining and pastoral town, Cloncurry is positioned to play a role in the critical minerals supply chain and hosts the Yulluna Aboriginal Corporation and the Mitakoodi Elders Council.

First Nations Peoples make up an even greater share of Cloncurry’s population than Mount Isa’s. At the 2021 Census, 868 people identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, representing 23.8% of the Shire’s population — more than five times the Queensland share of 4.6%. The overwhelming majority identified as Aboriginal (822 people).

The Cloncurry First Nations population is notably older than Mount Isa’s. Its median age was 28 years, against a Queensland First Nations median of 23, and the under-5 cohort (8.3%) was smaller while the 55-and-over cohorts were larger. This is a more established working-age and older population, which shifts the economic emphasis from youth-pathway development toward retaining and advancing an existing adult workforce and supporting older community members.

On household economics, First Nations households in Cloncurry recorded a median weekly household income of \$1,329, a median weekly rent of \$200, and an average of 2.9 people per household across 313 First Nations households. Median household income sits somewhat below Mount Isa’s, consistent with a smaller, less industrially concentrated economy.

Indicator (First Nations)	LGA	Queensland	Australia
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people	868	237,303	812,728
Share of total population	23.8%	4.6%	3.2%
Median age	28	23	24
Aged under 15	28.1%	33.7%	32.7%
First Nations households	313	—	—
Median weekly household income	\$1,329	\$1,517	—
Median weekly rent	\$200	\$305	—

Cloncurry combines a high First Nations population share with an established working-age population and active First Nations governance bodies, set against a thinner local economy than Mount Isa’s. The opportunity lies in connecting an existing adult workforce to supply-chain and employment opportunities as the critical minerals pipeline develops, and in supporting the commercial capability of local First Nations corporations.

Opportunity highlight. An established adult First Nations workforce and active governance bodies (Yulluna Aboriginal Corporation, Mitakoodi Elders Council) positioned close to the supply chain — the opportunity is direct employment conversion and building the commercial capability of local First Nations corporations.

4.3 McKinlay (Julia Creek)

McKinlay Shire is the principal LGA of CMZ 2 and the focus of Queensland’s emerging vanadium industry. Covering almost 41,000 km², the Shire lies on the traditional lands of the Wanamara, Yulluna and Kalkadoon peoples, with Julia Creek as its main township and administrative centre. The Shire hosts existing mining operations including the Eloise Copper Mine and South32’s Cannington mine, and is the location of the Saint Elmo Vanadium project and several other vanadium developments.

McKinlay’s First Nations population is small in absolute terms. At the 2021 Census, 43 people identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, with a median age of 22 — younger than both Mount Isa and Cloncurry. Because of the small population, the ABS itself notes that limited information is published for this area and that median values may be affected by confidentiality; the figures below should therefore be read as indicative only. First Nations households numbered 16, with a median weekly household income of \$1,374 and median weekly rent of \$152.

The economic profile of McKinlay is dominated by structural features of the wider Shire that bear directly on First Nations participation:

- The Shire’s total population was around 836 at the 2021 Census, with a median age of 36; the population has been in long-term decline and is projected to fall further to around 626 residents by 2046 (QGSO projections, as reported in EMM 2025).
- The resident labour force is small and already highly engaged, with high labour force participation (67.1%) and very low unemployment (1.4%) at June 2024 — meaning the region has limited capacity to supply local workers to new resource projects.
- Agriculture dominates, employing over 45% of the resident labour force and accounting for around 64% of locally registered businesses, principally beef cattle.
- The resource workforce is overwhelmingly non-resident: a resource-industry workforce of around 1,370 in June 2023, of whom fewer than 10 persons (0.7%) actually resided in the Shire — a near-total FIFO/ DIDO pattern.
- Housing stock is limited, with around 327 private dwellings in 2021 and a high unoccupancy rate (26%).

Indicator (First Nations)	LGA	Queensland	Australia
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people	43	237,303	812,728
Share of total population	5.1%	4.6%	3.2%
Median age	22	23	24
First Nations households	16	—	—
Median weekly household income	\$1,374	\$1,517	—
Median weekly rent	\$152	\$305	—

Note: small-population area; ABS publishes limited First Nations data for McKinlay and cautions that medians may be affected by confidentiality. Labour force participation and industry figures above are Shire-wide (all residents), drawn from the EMM Social Baseline Study (2025).

McKinlay sets out the defining challenge of CMZ 2 in its sharpest form. A major vanadium pipeline sits above a small, ageing, agriculture-based community with almost no resident resource workforce and a small First Nations population, so local participation alone cannot meet the opportunity. Realising it depends on linking First Nations people and businesses from the wider region — including the larger Mount Isa and Cloncurry communities — into the McKinlay pipeline, and on ensuring the near-total FIFO model does not exclude them by default.

Opportunity highlight. The vanadium pipeline’s scale far exceeds local supply — the opportunity is structured regional linkage: connecting Mount Isa and Cloncurry First Nations workers and businesses into McKinlay projects through recruitment, transport and procurement design that counters the default FIFO model.

4.4 Richmond

Richmond Shire is the eastern LGA of CMZ 2 and, with McKinlay, completes the Julia Creek/Richmond zone. Covering around 26,000 km², the Shire sits on the traditional lands of the Wanamara, Mbara and Yirendali peoples, with Richmond as its main township and administrative centre. This is the Country of the Wanamara people, whose representative contact is part of the Program’s stakeholder cohort (see Section 3.1).

Richmond Shire shares the structural profile of McKinlay but is a distinct community in its own right:

- In 2024 the Shire was home to around 788 people, of whom 59% reside in the township of Richmond. The population is stable but slowly contracting — declining at about 0.7% per annum over the decade to 2023 — and is projected to fall to around 693 residents by 2046 (QGSO projections, as reported in EMM 2025).
- The resident labour force is small and already highly engaged, with high labour force participation (68.4%) and low unemployment (1.4%), indicating limited local capacity to supply workers to new resource projects.
- Educational attainment is comparatively low — 43.3% of the population has completed Year 12 or equivalent — with Richmond State School providing schooling only to Year 10, so further education requires leaving the region.
- Agriculture dominates, employing around 36% of the resident labour force, accounting for over 61% of locally registered businesses, and contributing around \$86 million (36%) of the Shire’s economic output, principally beef cattle.
- Housing stock is limited (around 331 private dwellings in 2021) with a high unoccupancy rate (26.6%).
- The development pipeline is active and diversifying: stakeholders identified a gold and copper mine, an inland port proposal, local infrastructure upgrades, and various renewable energy projects progressing in the Richmond area.

Indicator (First Nations)	LGA	Queensland	Australia
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people	55	237,303	812,728
Share of total population	7.2%	4.6%	3.2%
Median age	31	23	24
First Nations households	27	—	—
Median weekly household income	\$1,958	\$1,517	—
Median weekly rent	\$116	\$305	—

Note: First Nations-specific Census figures for Richmond Shire to be confirmed from the ABS Richmond (Qld) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander QuickStats; Richmond Shire has a small First Nations population, so some cells may be confidentialised. Shire-wide demographic, labour force and industry figures above are drawn from the EMM Social Baseline Study (2025) and QGSO regional profiles.

Richmond shares McKinlay’s structural position but differs in two respects that shape the opportunity. It is Wanamara Country, giving it particular cultural significance within the Program, and its pipeline is broadening beyond vanadium into gold, copper, port infrastructure and renewables. As in McKinlay, participation will rely on drawing First Nations people and businesses from across the wider region into a pipeline the small resident community cannot staff alone — but here the education-to-employment gap, which currently requires young people to leave the Shire to advance, is the additional barrier to address.

Opportunity highlight. A diversifying pipeline (mining, inland port, renewables) on Wanamara Country with almost no spare local workforce — the opportunity is early Traditional Owner engagement and enterprise participation designed in from project outset, including on-country roles in land management, cultural services and agriculture-adjacent contracting.

4.5 Regional Summary and Comparative Analysis

Read together, the four LGAs of the two Critical Minerals Zones present two distinct economic and demographic realities, which in turn imply two different strategies for First Nations economic participation.

CMZ 1 (Mount Isa and Cloncurry) holds the region's largest First Nations communities. First Nations Peoples make up 21.5% of Mount Isa and 23.8% of Cloncurry — several times the Queensland share — alongside established First Nations corporations and an existing industrial base. Mount Isa’s population is young and growing, pointing to an emerging workforce and a training-and-pathways agenda, while Cloncurry’s is more established and working-age. These two LGAs therefore hold both the deepest First Nations connection to the regional economy and the greatest concentration of people positioned to participate in it.

CMZ 2 (McKinlay and Richmond) includes a substantial pipeline of proposed critical minerals development, but rests on a small resident base. Both Shires have small, ageing, slowly declining populations with small First Nations counts, very high labour force participation among the few residents, near-total reliance on a non-resident (FIFO/DIDO) resource workforce, and agriculture as the dominant local industry. The vanadium, gold, copper, port and renewables projects in the pipeline sit atop communities that cannot staff them locally.

The comparative implication follows from the resident populations. CMZ 1 (Mount Isa and Cloncurry) holds substantial resident First Nations populations, active First Nations corporations and an existing industrial base. CMZ 2 (McKinlay and Richmond) has small, ageing resident populations with small First Nations counts and a resource workforce that is overwhelmingly non-resident. A participation strategy in CMZ 2 that relied only on the small local population would reach very few First Nations people. This suggests that maximising First Nations economic participation depends on connecting First Nations communities and businesses from across the wider region — including the larger CMZ 1 populations — to opportunities, rather than treating each LGA in isolation. Some groups’ Country spans both zones, which supports a regional rather than locality-by-locality approach.

Indicator (First Nations)	Mount Isa	Cloncurry	McKinlay	Richmond	Qld
First Nations population	4,020	868	43	55	237,303
Share of population	21.5%	23.8%	5.1%	7.2%	4.6%
Median age	24	28	22	31	23
CMZ	CMZ 1	CMZ 1	CMZ 2	CMZ 2	—

Sources: ABS 2021 Census (First Nations QuickStats by LGA); EMM Social Baseline Study (2025) and QGSO regional profiles for CMZ 2 Shire-wide figures. Richmond First Nations figures to be confirmed.

4.6 Linkages to the Critical Minerals Zones

The demographic and economic baseline connects to the critical minerals development pipeline in three ways that shape the participation opportunity.

First, the workforce link. The CMZ 2 projects will draw their workforce overwhelmingly from outside the local Shires. Whether First Nations people share in that workforce depends on deliberate pathways — training, recruitment and retention designed to reach the larger First Nations populations of Mount Isa and Cloncurry and to bring them into projects centred on McKinlay and Richmond. Without such pathways, the default FIFO model is likely to continue recruiting from established interstate and coastal labour pools and to bypass First Nations communities.

Second, the enterprise and procurement link. The thin local business base in CMZ 2 (dominated by agriculture), combined with the fact that relevant First Nations enterprises are concentrated regionally rather than in the immediate project localities, means that supply-chain participation will not happen automatically. It will require proponents to identify and contract with First Nations enterprises — including established operators and the commercial arms of PBCs — across the wider region, not only within the project Shire.

Third, the capability and benefit link. The young age structure in Mount Isa, the education-to-employment gap in Richmond, and the established working-age population in Cloncurry each point to different but complementary investments — youth pathways, local education capacity, and advancement of existing workers respectively. Aligning these investments with the timing of the project pipeline is what will turn a period of development into durable First Nations economic participation, rather than a passing boom staffed from outside the region.

These linkages are taken up in the engagement findings (Sections 5 to 8), the interpretation of those findings (Section 9), and the SIA crosswalk (Section 10).



05 Economic Baseline

First Nations Participation

This section presents the baseline of First Nations economic participation across the Critical Minerals Zones.

It draws together the secondary data of Section 4 with the engagement findings detailed in Sections 7 and 8, organised around the dimensions of economic participation most relevant to the critical minerals sector: overall economic contribution, employment, enterprise, procurement, and training and capability. Each sub-section sets out what the secondary data shows, then what the engagement indicated.

5.1 Economic Contribution Overview

First Nations economic participation in the CMZs must be understood against an economy that is dominated by mining and agriculture, and by a resource workforce that is overwhelmingly non-resident. Across the CMZ 2 labour force, mining is 93.6% non-resident and construction 67.8% non-resident, and major operations such as Cannington run on a 100% FIFO basis. This structural feature — large-scale resource activity that draws very little of its workforce from the local population — is the single most important context for First Nations economic participation: the economic value generated in the zones largely accrues to people who do not live there.

The First Nations economic stake is largest in CMZ 1, where First Nations people make up over a fifth of the Mount Isa and Cloncurry populations. The baseline question for the Program is the degree to which First Nations people and businesses currently capture a share of the economic activity generated in the zones — through wages, enterprise income, procurement and training — and what would be required to increase it.

5.2 First Nations Employment

Secondary data: The 2021 Census records First Nations labour-force participation, employment and industry of employment for each LGA. Across the region, First Nations workers are concentrated in public administration, health, education and community services rather than in the mining and construction industries that drive the zones' economies — a pattern consistent with the high non-resident share of the resource workforce.

Engagement analysis: The engagement reframed the employment question from availability to access and retention. Participants consistently distinguished gaining a job from keeping one, identifying retention support — not aspiration or recruitment alone — as the binding constraint (Section 7.4). Three access barriers recurred: fly-in/fly-out recruitment models that draw labour from

outside the region and overlook local people for entry-level roles; workplace culture described as unwelcoming, where belonging rather than aptitude is the real obstacle to First Nations participation in mining; and the absence of sustained support once a person is employed. Participants also cautioned against assuming operational mining roles suit everyone, and asked that workforce strategy present a genuine spectrum of pathways rather than channelling people toward mining work that may not align with their interests, cultural obligations or circumstances (Section 7.6). The clearest employment opportunities identified lay on country — ranger programs, biodiversity and water-systems work — and in targeted skilled pathways, including a proposal to bring First Nations women into diesel-fitting and fitter-and-turner trades from Mount Isa.

Detailed LGA labour-force figures (participation rate, employment rate, top industries) to be completed from the ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Profiles.

5.3 First Nations Enterprise

Secondary data: The formal First Nations enterprise base relevant to the zones is uneven across the public registries. The EMM Social Baseline Study reported that, at the time of its 2025 research, it did not identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses listed on Supply Nation or Black Business Finder for the immediate CMZ 2 localities. A broader regional search across Mount Isa and North West Queensland, however, identifies a number of registered and certified First Nations enterprises in sectors relevant to the critical minerals supply chain, including civil construction, mining services and workforce supply, alongside established operators identified through engagement that are not captured in either directory. The practical baseline finding is that supplier searches confined to a single shire, or to a single directory, will understate the First Nations enterprise capability available to proponents, which is better understood at a regional scale.

Engagement analysis: Engagement confirmed both a real First Nations enterprise base and the structural constraints holding it back. Participants identified existing and prospective enterprise across land and water management, biodiversity services, ranger work, revegetation and rehabilitation, grazing and the beef industry, cultural services (art, storytelling, tourism, advisory), and broader supply-chain activity spanning construction, transport and hospitality (Section 7.3). The most developed enterprise model put forward was an Indigenous-owned biodiversity company — Traditional Owner-governed, holding authority over methodology, and delivering the studies proponents require rather than supplying labour under others' science. The recurring constraint was commercial capacity: participants described the difficulty, cost and slowness of establishing and running corporations and trusts, and reliance on external legal, accounting and taxation advice that prevents groups from negotiating as equals (Section 7.4). Catalytic, patient investment was identified as the enabler that works, drawn from lived experience of early-stage backing setting an enterprise trajectory.

5.4 Procurement Participation

Secondary data: With major operations running on FIFO models and procurement managed through corporate supply chains, First Nations procurement participation in the zones is not visible in the available secondary data and appears limited. The absence of registered businesses on national supplier directories compounds this, since these directories are the primary tools proponents use to find First Nations suppliers.

Engagement analysis: Engagement provided direct evidence that procurement structures, rather than capability, limit First Nations participation. Participants reported Indigenous businesses receiving only small, short work packages while larger contracts are outsourced to non-Indigenous and capital-city firms — in at least one case, contract work outsourced past a capable local Indigenous business already supplying the sector (Section 8.1). The consistent request was for

procurement designed to grow businesses rather than allocate token packages: longer contract horizons, genuine roles in joint ventures rather than tokenism, and small-business incentives. Participants strongly preferred enduring contracts and relationship agreements over grants, and proposed proponent-funded trust structures — proponents contributing as shareholders alongside government, independent of grant cycles — as the vehicle to keep First Nations enterprises viable between and across projects (Section 7.5).

5.5 Training and Capability

Secondary data: The demographic profile points to a clear capability agenda that differs by zone — a young, emerging workforce in Mount Isa; an established working-age population in Cloncurry; and a pronounced education-to-employment gap in Richmond, where local schooling stops at Year 10. Existing training infrastructure includes the Myuma group's training-linked operations, which offer a regional model of culturally grounded, work-connected training.

Engagement analysis: Participants treated training as the enabler underpinning every other pathway, but were specific about what makes it work. Training must have a direct line of sight to real jobs — accredited, with onboarding beginning well ahead of construction so local people are ready when opportunities open, rather than accumulating short-term certificates that lead nowhere (Sections 7.3, 8.1). Barriers identified were limited local training options, financial constraints, and the need to relocate for education — with culture shock flagged as a genuine retention risk for young people who move for study or work. Participants called for industry-government-school-provider collaboration on locally accessible pathways matched to future workforce demand, and for education support (including scholarships tied to accommodation) that does not place the housing burden on families.

5.6 Capacity and Readiness

Secondary data / structural: “Readiness” in this context is two-sided. It refers both to the readiness of First Nations people and businesses to participate (skills, qualifications, business systems, scale) and to the readiness of industry and government to enable participation (inclusive recruitment, procurement settings, training investment, genuine engagement). The baseline indicates significant latent capacity — a large young First Nations population in CMZ 1, established enterprises such as Myuma, and active First Nations corporations — alongside structural barriers that prevent that capacity from connecting to the project pipeline.

Engagement analysis: Engagement sharpened the two-sided nature of readiness. On the community side, the binding constraint identified was organisational: Traditional Owner organisations carry heavy responsibilities across cultural heritage, land management and representation while operating with thin capacity, and participants repeatedly nominated governance, leadership development and business capability — the ability to run corporations and trusts and negotiate as equals — as the precondition for equitable participation (Sections 7.4, 8.1). On the industry and government side, participants located much of the readiness gap in the enabling environment: engagement that reaches all Traditional Owners including common-law holders; a preference for durable contracts over grants; recognition that cultural impact is distinct from social impact and not fully captured by an SIA; and a call for First Nations–targeted education explaining what critical minerals development involves, without which assumptions form and trust erodes before engagement begins.

5.7 Gap Analysis

Drawing the secondary data and engagement analysis together, the gap between current participation and the outcomes First Nations people identify as wanted can be expressed across each domain, together with the support required to close it.

Domain	Current state (baseline)	Desired state (participant-identified)	Support required to close the gap
Employment	First Nations workers concentrated in non-resource industries; resource workforce largely FIFO and non-local; retention unsupported	Local First Nations people accessing and remaining in resource and on-country roles, with a genuine choice of pathways	Local-first recruitment; retention and cultural-safety support; a spectrum of roles beyond operational mining; early training aligned to jobs
Enterprise	Real but under-recognised enterprise base; capability concentrated regionally; thin registration	Traditional Owner-governed enterprises operating across the supply chain, including biodiversity, land, water and cultural services	Capacity-building for corporations and trusts; catalytic investment; regional (not single-locality) supplier identification
Procurement	Small, short packages; larger contracts outsourced to non-local firms	Contracts that grow businesses; genuine roles in joint ventures; direct benefit flow to Traditional Owner entities	Longer contract horizons; procurement designed for growth; enduring trust structures over grants
Training and capability	Limited local pathways; relocation required; certificates without job lines	Accredited, locally accessible training with a direct line to real jobs	Industry–government–provider collaboration; onboarding ahead of construction; education and relocation support
Governance and readiness	Thin organisational capacity; engagement centred on formal bodies	Strong Traditional Owner institutions; engagement reaching all rights-holders	Investment in governance and leadership; durable, culturally grounded engagement structures
Wellbeing and retention	Out-migration to hubs; loss of skills and connection	Regional liveability that retains and draws back families	Regional healthcare, housing and education; cultural connection and recognition as retention factors



06 Interpretation of the Current State

This section interprets the baseline established in Sections 4 and 5 — moving from what the data shows to why the current state exists.

It identifies the structural enablers and constraints that shape First Nations economic participation in the CMZs, situates them within the Native Title landscape, and examines how market access and workforce dynamics operate in practice. The interpretation here is analytical and contextual; it is tested against, and enriched by, the engagement findings in Sections 7 and 8.

6.1 Structural Enablers

Several structural features of the region support First Nations economic participation and provide a foundation to build on:

- **Demographic weight in CMZ 1.** The large First Nations populations of Mount Isa and Cloncurry — over a fifth of each LGA — mean there is a substantial resident population with a direct stake in, and potential to supply labour to, the regional economy. Mount Isa’s young age structure adds a sizeable emerging workforce.
- **Established cultural authority and governance.** Determined Native Title across much of the region has produced functioning Prescribed Body Corporates — Kalkadoon, Mitakoodi and Mayi, Yulluna and others — that provide recognised points of authority, governance capacity, and in some cases commercial vehicles for economic participation.
- **Proven enterprise models.** Established First Nations enterprises in the region demonstrate that culturally grounded, commercially viable businesses can operate at scale — holding government and commercial contracts and linking work to accredited training — providing a working template for others.
- **A coordinated development pipeline.** The CMZ framework, with its shared baseline studies and concentrated government support, creates a structured environment in which First Nations participation can be planned for rather than left to chance.
- **Government attention and investment.** Significant Commonwealth and State investment in the North West Minerals Province, together with this Program itself, signals a policy environment receptive to First Nations economic inclusion.

6.2 Structural Constraints

Against these enablers sit structural constraints that currently limit participation:

- **The FIFO/DIDO workforce model.** The dominant fly-in/fly-out model (Section 5.1) means resource employment largely bypasses local communities by default. Workforces are recruited from Townsville, South East Queensland and Cairns, not from the towns nearest the mines.
- **Small resident base in CMZ 2.** As Section 4.5 sets out, the CMZ 2 shires have small resident First Nations populations, so participation there cannot rely on local recruitment alone and requires deliberate regional connection to the larger First Nations communities of CMZ 1.
- **Under-identification of First Nations enterprise.** A supplier search confined to the immediate CMZ 2 localities, or to a single directory, returns few First Nations businesses — even though a regional search across Mount Isa and North West Queensland identifies a number of registered and certified First Nations enterprises in construction, civil, mining-services and workforce-supply sectors. Procurement processes that search narrowly therefore understate the First Nations enterprise capability genuinely available.
- **The education-to-employment gap.** Lower Year 12 completion and limited local schooling (notably Richmond’s Year 10 ceiling) mean young people must leave the region to advance, weakening the local pipeline into skilled resource work.
- **Thin local economies and housing.** Small, ageing populations, agriculture-dominated local economies, and constrained housing stock in CMZ 2 limit the local base from which participation can grow and raise the cost of living and working locally.
- **Internal governance complexity.** Histories of external administration and unresolved internal divisions in some groups (Section 3.1) can complicate engagement and slow economic decision-making.

6.3 The Native Title Landscape

Native Title shapes the economic landscape of the CMZs, even though this Program is not a Native Title exercise. Much of the region is subject to determined Native Title: the Kalkadoon determination (2011) recognises rights over approximately 38,719 km² around Mount Isa, including exclusive possession over a portion; the Mitakoodi and Mayi People #5 claim has been determined in stages through 2024, with a further determination in 2026, covering Country across the Cloncurry and Julia Creek districts; and the Yulluna determination covers Country to the south-west of Cloncurry. Other Country — including Wanamara Country around Richmond — remains undetermined.

For economic participation, this landscape matters in three ways. First, determined Native Title and its PBCs provide established legal and governance structures through which agreements, land access and benefit-sharing can be negotiated. Second, the existence of determination does not equate to economic capability — holding Native Title and being positioned to participate commercially are different things, and the gap between them is part of what this Program documents. Third, and critically, the Program’s scope is deliberately broader than Native Title: groups whose Country is undetermined, and individuals who hold cultural connection and economic stake without formal legal recognition, are fully within scope. Cultural authority exists independently of determination status, and economic participation should not be gated on legal outcomes.

6.4 Market Access

The central interpretive finding on market access is that participation does not happen by default — the market structures of the region actively work against it unless deliberately countered. Three mechanisms stand out. Procurement operates through corporate supply chains and national directories that do not necessarily capture local First Nations enterprises, so capable businesses often never enter the consideration set.

Employment operates through FIFO recruitment pipelines anchored in distant cities, so local workers are not the default labour source. And scale and prequalification requirements — insurance, accreditation, contract size, payment terms — favour large, established contractors over emerging First Nations enterprises. Each of these is a structural barrier rather than a reflection of capability or willingness, which means each is amenable to deliberate intervention by proponents and government: targeted supplier identification, local and First Nations recruitment pathways, and contract structuring that allows smaller and emerging businesses to compete.

6.5 Workforce Dynamics

The workforce dynamics of the region bring the participation challenge into focus. The resource workforce is large but overwhelmingly non-resident, while the resident labour force in CMZ 2 is small and already near-fully employed — so new projects cannot be staffed locally and will, absent intervention, import labour. The First Nations workforce is concentrated in CMZ 1 and in non-resource industries (public administration, health, education, community services), at one remove from the resource jobs that drive the economy. The young First Nations population of Mount Isa represents the region’s most significant future workforce opportunity, but converting that potential into resource-sector participation depends on training and pathway investment now, timed to the development pipeline. In short, the region faces not a shortage of potential First Nations workers but a set of disconnections — between where people live and where jobs are, between the industries First Nations people work in and the industries that are growing, and between an emerging young workforce and the training that would ready it. Interpreting the baseline this way reframes the task from whether the capacity exists to how that latent capacity is connected to opportunity — the question the interpretation in Section 9 and the recommendations in Section 11 address.



07

Engagement Findings

Thematic Analysis

This section presents the cross-cutting themes that emerged across the engagement, drawing together the perspectives of the First Nations groups, businesses, organisations and individuals engaged through the Program.

It is organised thematically; the detailed group-by-group is provided in Section 8. Findings are reported in a de-identified form, attributed to a Traditional Owner group or category rather than to an individual, consistent with the privacy and data sovereignty principles at Sections 2.5 and 2.6.

7.1 High-Level Themes

Engagement completed to date has reached participants connected to six Traditional Owner groups — Wanamara, Waluwarra, Mitakoodi and Mayi, Kalkadoon, Yulluna and Waanyi. Despite the diversity of groups, country and circumstance, a considerable degree of common ground emerged. Six themes recur across nearly every consultation and are examined in turn below. The consistency of these themes across otherwise different groups is itself a finding: they appear as a broadly shared regional perspective rather than isolated individual views.

This consistency should not be read as uniformity. While strong common ground emerged around most themes, individual groups differed in emphasis and priority. Some participants stressed enterprise and self-determination through Traditional Owner-governed structures; others foregrounded workforce access, cultural recognition, or the retention of people and connection to country. Some expressed particular concern about representation and the reach of existing structures, while others focused on capability and commercial capacity. These differences of emphasis are reflected in the group-by-group account at Section 8, and proponents and stakeholders should confirm the specific position of any particular group through direct engagement rather than relying on the general themes alone.

The engagement was analysed against six thematic domains, applied consistently across every group to allow common themes and group-specific positions to be distinguished: economic aspirations; opportunities identified; challenges and barriers; supports needed from government and industry; outcomes to be avoided; and governance and decision-making.

7.2 Economic Aspirations

Across every group, participants expressed a clear and consistent aspiration: to be genuine participants in the regional economy, not short-term beneficiaries of project spending. Participants distinguished lasting participation from one-off project expenditure, and emphasised that First Nations people should be able to define their own aspirations rather than have priorities set externally by proponents or government.

Two features characterise these aspirations. First, they are enduring and intergenerational — participants spoke of benefits that last generations, trust structures that outlive individual projects, and success measured by asset creation, business ownership and the strength of regional First Nations institutions rather than by immediate employment counts. Second, they are self-determined — participants encouraged future-forward engagement that treats aspiration as data, and cautioned that real equity is better measured through a genuine sense of value than through quotas or targets. A third feature emerged strongly through the engagement: enforceability — aspirations rest on commitments that can be relied upon, with benefits secured through binding agreements rather than goodwill arrangements.

7.3 Challenges and Barriers

The barriers reported were consistent across groups:

- **Representation.** Participants observed that formal representative structures do not always reach every rights-holder or fully reflect cultural authority, and asked that engagement also run directly through Elders and recognised Traditional Owners.
- **Local employment access.** Fly-in/fly-out workforce models were seen to limit local Indigenous employment opportunities and, in some communities, to weaken local cohesion; participants reported local people being overlooked for entry-level roles.
- **Retention, not just recruitment.** Several participants noted that gaining a job is not the main barrier — sustaining employment is — and that support to remain in work is often absent.
- **Pre-employment access.** Participants identified practical barriers that exclude people before employment begins: transport (“if they can’t get there, that automatically leaves them out”), unstable housing, and the cost of licences and tickets such as the White Card.
- **Workplace accommodation of cultural obligations.** The frequency of Sorry Business in community is often disbelieved by employers, standard bereavement leave is inadequate, and employees who took the time genuinely needed would risk their employment; cultural practice was observed to be embedded in organisational policy only within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- **Unenforceable agreements.** Historical agreements exchanging consent for employment and training commitments were reported as not honoured, with good-faith arrangements providing no legal standing for enforcement — depleting trust in negotiation processes and hardening a preference for legally binding terms.
- **Commercial capacity.** Participants described the difficulty and cost of establishing and running corporations and trusts, and a reliance on external legal, accounting and taxation advice that is slow and expensive.
- **Procurement access.** Participants reported Indigenous businesses receiving smaller, shorter work packages while larger contracts are awarded to non-Indigenous or capital-city firms.
- **Understanding of critical minerals.** Participants identified a gap in First Nations-targeted education explaining what critical minerals development involves, noting that this gap allows assumptions to form and erodes trust before engagement begins.
- **Out-migration and connection to country.** Participants described families relocating to Townsville and coastal centres for health, housing and education — often permanently — which draws skills and leadership away from communities.

7.4 Opportunities Identified

Participants identified opportunities well beyond operational mining roles, and several observed that mining jobs should not be assumed to be the preferred pathway for everyone. The opportunities cluster into the following areas:

- **Land, water and biodiversity enterprise** — Indigenous-owned biodiversity companies governing and delivering survey, plant identification and flora and fauna work; ranger programs offering real jobs on country; revegetation, invasive-species management and rehabilitation contracts; and cultural-flows and water-systems management.
- **Pastoral and grazing participation** — beef-industry involvement, including the acquisition of cattle properties by Traditional Owner groups.
- **Cultural enterprise** — commissioned art, videography and storytelling; a Keeping Place for cultural knowledge; place-making and welcome signage; and tourism, cultural education and advisory services.
- **Entrepreneurship and trade** — catalytic investment in First Nations businesses, and an identified opportunity in international intertribal trade to position the region's people globally.
- **Professional and skilled pathways** — long-horizon investment in First Nations professionals such as lawyers, doctors and judges, and a proposal for a dedicated trade pathway bringing First Nations women into diesel-fitting and fitter-and-turner roles from Mount Isa. Participants also identified structured school-to-trade pathways through training camps and TAFE, supported by structured after-school activity that keeps young people engaged through school and into work.

7.5 Outcomes to Be Avoided

Participants were equally clear about what they do not want:

- Engagement that is procedural in nature, or conducted only after decisions have effectively been made.
- Cultural and engagement roles performed by external consultants rather than by Traditional Owners themselves.
- An assumption that operational mining roles suit everyone, regardless of individual interests, cultural obligations or circumstances.
- Token or quota-driven participation that does not deliver real equity.
- Damage to, or destruction of, documented cultural sites — cited by participants as the mistake that must never be repeated.
- Good-faith gestures in place of secured, enforceable participation.
- Development that generates significant wealth without lasting local benefit.
- Engagement processes that produce a report without measurable outcomes.

7.6 Supports Needed (Government and Industry)

Participants were specific and constructive about the supports they identified:

- **Enduring contracts and trusts, rather than grants and one-off arrangements** — a consistent preference for relationship agreements and contracts running for the life of a project, and for standing trust structures funded by proponents alongside government and independent of grant cycles. Where trust has been depleted by unhonoured arrangements, participants indicated future agreements would require legally binding terms negotiated through the group's own legal representatives.
- **Capacity-building** — practical support to establish and operate corporations and trusts, and affordable access to quality legal, accounting and taxation advice so that groups can negotiate as equals.
- **Culturally embedded workplace policy** — bereavement and kinship obligations accommodated in human-resource policy with planned backfill arrangements, cultural understanding built into organisational policy from the foundation, and Elders paid for cultural knowledge provided to organisations.
- **Engagement that reaches all Traditional Owners** — including common-law holders and families outside formal native title structures — and that meets people where they live, including in regional hubs such as Townsville.
- **Early, embedded and whole-of-life-cycle engagement** — training and onboarding well ahead of construction, dedicated Indigenous engagement capacity within operations, and free, prior and informed consent sought before key decisions are made. Participants described employment as a whole-of-life-cycle journey (from school engagement to post-employment transition) rather than recruitment alone, and proposed that proponents document Country jointly with Traditional Owners during exploration and pre-feasibility, both to build local capability and to establish baselines that inform rehabilitation, closure and genuine free, prior and informed consent. Comprehensive human-resource frameworks — not cultural-awareness training alone — were identified as central to culturally safe, sustained employment.
- **The report as a standard** — a proposal that this report be used to set an engagement threshold that helps proponents understand how communities wish to be engaged.

7.7 Governance and Decision-Making

Governance emerged as a theme in its own right. Participants sought recognition of Traditional Owners as rights-holders engaged directly, rather than through general community consultation; standing engagement structures with consistent representation across zones; models that bring both representative bodies and broader community voices to the table; and regional Traditional Owner leadership structures. Underlying these is a consistent view that cultural authority — including kinship and succession under traditional law, and recognition of common-law holders regardless of determination status — should be the basis of engagement legitimacy. Participants also emphasised that Custodians are the decision-makers for Country — permission is sought through local Traditional Owners first — and that bodies such as ORIC, the NNTT and PBCs are not the decision-makers for common-law rights.



08 Detailed Engagement Findings

This section sets out the detailed findings of the engagement, first by First Nations group, then by Critical Minerals Zone, followed by cross-cutting issues and any matters received outside the Program’s scope.

Each group is reported against the same six thematic domains used in Section 7, so that common ground and group-specific positions can be read consistently. All findings are de-identified and attributed to a Traditional Owner group rather than to an individual, consistent with Section 2.

8.1 By First Nations Group

Each group engaged through the Program is profiled below against a consistent template. Groups are listed by Critical Minerals Zone and area of connection. Where a group was engaged through more than one representative, findings are consolidated under the group.

Wanamara People

ZONE / AREA: CMZ 2 — RICHMOND.
NATIVE TITLE STATUS: COUNTRY UNDETERMINED.

Economic aspirations: Recognition of Traditional Owners as stakeholders and rights-holders in their own right, not folded into general community consultation. Participants sought a sense of connection strong enough to draw Traditional Owner families back to the region — through recognition, employment and visible cultural presence — and planning that anticipates those families returning.

Opportunities identified: Grazing and beef-industry participation, including the acquisition of cattle properties by Traditional Owner groups; revegetation, ranger and invasive-species contracts as real jobs on country; and cultural enterprise including commissioned art, videography, storytelling, place-making, welcome signage and a Keeping Place for cultural knowledge. Commissioned work should be procured from Traditional Owner artists rather than outsourced.

Barriers and concerns raised: Engagement that skips recognition of history and autonomy is regarded as box-ticking. Past breakaway arrangements and failed revegetation were cited as the cost of transactional dealings. Participants raised concern that cultural and engagement roles are performed by interstate consultants rather than Traditional Owners, and that agreements lapse or reset with each change of government or proponent.

Supports sought: Assistance to establish corporations with proper legal support; accredited training with a direct line to real jobs, beginning well ahead of construction; an Indigenous Engagement Officer embedded in every mine; relationship agreements that run for the term of the mine, with a 25-year horizon referenced; and education scholarships tied to accommodation so families do not carry the housing burden. Job-seeker and labour-hire pathways were accepted as entry points where they convert to secure employment. Hospitals and health services in critical areas were identified as a priority, alongside culture-shock support for young people relocating for study or work.

Outcomes to be avoided: Box-ticking engagement; cultural roles filled by external consultants; relocation without genuine involvement and inclusion; and benefits flowing to entities other than actual Traditional Owner groups in the region.



Governance and decision-making: A standing Community Roundtable with a locked-in representative for each area or zone, so the right people speak for the right country; and engagement that extends to all Traditional Owners, including common-law holders and families outside formal native title structures.

"We want to run our own cattle, graze our own beef."

Waluwarra People

ZONE / AREA: CMZ 1 — DAJARRA DISTRICT
NATIVE TITLE STATUS: COMMON-LAW HOLDERS;
SEE ALSO BWWAC.

Economic aspirations: Self-determination and the capacity for Traditional Owners to manage their own affairs — to establish and run corporations, directors and trust accounts, and to negotiate as equals — so that benefits from agreements reach communities and last generations. Real equity is understood to be measured through a genuine sense of value rather than quotas or targets.

Opportunities identified: An Indigenous-owned biodiversity company positioned to govern, sign off on methodology and deliver biodiversity studies (plant identification, ecosystems, flora and fauna); reinstatement and expansion of ranger programs, with Traditional Owners introducing their own people; and Traditional Owner-led management of water systems, combining traditional knowledge with modern science.

Barriers and concerns raised: The difficulty, cost and slowness of external accounting, legal and taxation advice, and of establishing the structures needed to operate and thrive; a gap in First Nations-targeted education explaining what critical minerals development involves, which allows assumptions to form; and a concern that risks to artesian springs and water systems of high cultural value are not adequately addressed. Participants drew a distinction between social impact assessment and cultural impact, noting the latter is not fully captured by an SIA — a position developed in subsequent engagement as a considered statutory argument (see Section 9.8). Housing was also raised: home ownership is constrained by cost and availability, land tenure remains a barrier, and compounding social pressures contribute to overcrowding.

Supports sought: Practical capacity-building to run corporations and trusts; affordable access to quality legal, accounting and taxation advice; First Nations-targeted education on critical minerals; a recognised Indigenous water allocation and a seat at the table on water decisions; and a clear preference for contracts and relationship agreements over grants. Subsequent engagement added permanent funding for ranger programs supported by appropriate award structures rather than grant reliance; equitable benefit-sharing and offsets delivering lasting financial outcomes; and mapping of Country — water systems, soil, flora and fauna — with remedies for impairment clearly identified.

Outcomes to be avoided: Participation treated as a numbers game through quotas and targets; grant-dependency in place of durable commercial arrangements; and commercial use of bush-medicine knowledge without benefits flowing back to knowledge holders.

Governance and decision-making: Recognition of common-law holders who hold rights to country under their own law, whether or not native title has been determined; and Traditional Owner governance over biodiversity and water enterprise, including authority over methodology. ORIC, the NNTT and PBCs are not the decision-makers for common-law rights — the right to speak for Country exists under the group's own law.

"My people must be included in the management of water systems, bio-diversity studies and ranger programs."



Kalkadoon People

ZONE / AREA: CMZ 1 — MOUNT ISA.
NATIVE TITLE STATUS: DETERMINED (2011).

Economic aspirations: A generational shift toward entrepreneurship — young people building enterprises while keeping culture alive — with entrepreneurship championed visibly and consistently rather than episodically. Participation in critical minerals was framed as stewardship, pairing extraction with responsibility for regeneration, which removes shame from participation. Participants sought benefit flowing directly to Traditional Owner families, including royalties and shares from mining operations, and preferred treaty-style agreements and stronger land-rights recognition over native title alone. Reports and engagement should carry the whole community’s voice, not only formally recognised groups.

Opportunities identified: A trade pathway bringing First Nations women into diesel-fitting and fitter-and-turner roles from Mount Isa; high-value technical and digital pathways (data, coding, document control) straight from school; catalytic, community-facing entrepreneurship investment modelled on early-stage backing that works; and international intertribal trade as a timely global opportunity. Participants described a build-up-and-return model that develops skills without permanent displacement from the region.

Barriers and concerns raised: A workplace culture that can feel unwelcoming to First Nations people — belonging, not aptitude, described as the real barrier; a rational trust deficit after decades of being studied without return; the wealth paradox of a region that generates significant wealth yet lacks facilities and services; and the geography barrier that puts travel for sport, arts and competition out of reach for young people. Participants also raised concerns about recognition and representation of Traditional Owners, noting that historical record-keeping — including name changes made by police — still complicates formal recognition today.

Supports sought: Proponent-funded enterprise acceleration and patient catalytic capital; procurement designed to grow businesses rather than allocate token packages; small-business incentives and innovation in how procurement engages First Nations enterprise; whole-of-community investment in events, clubs and facilities, remembered a generation later as psychosocial infrastructure; and sport, arts and travel support that defeats the geography barrier. A proposal that this report be used to standardise engagement and set a threshold for how communities wish to be engaged.

Outcomes to be avoided: Baseline studies that reduce the First Nations presence to a labour-force characteristics table; engagement that treats the community as a report rather than delivering measurable outcomes; and tokenism in partnerships and procurement.

Governance and decision-making: Engagement that begins by asking people how they want to show up, that captures the whole of community in one voice, and that treats the report as living engagement infrastructure with enduring communication channels rather than a point-in-time document. A Kalkadoon council or board was sought as a regional leadership and governance vehicle.



“We can teach our people how to contribute, and benefit from critical minerals.”

Mitakoodi and Mayi People

ZONE / AREA: CMZ 1 / CMZ 2 — CLONCURRENCY / JULIA CREEK.
NATIVE TITLE STATUS: DETERMINED (2024, IN STAGES).

Economic aspirations: First Nations people as genuine participants in the regional economy rather than short-term beneficiaries of project expenditure, defining their own aspirations and shaping development on their own terms. Success was measured on intergenerational outcomes — business ownership, asset creation, educational attainment, wellbeing and the strength of regional First Nations institutions — beyond the operational life of any project.

Opportunities identified: Indigenous-owned businesses across the full supply chain — construction, operations, environmental management, cultural heritage services, land management, transport and hospitality. Traditional Owner knowledge of country as an economic asset matched to environmental monitoring, rehabilitation, water management and biodiversity work across the full mine lifecycle, including early documentation of Country and closure planning; and practical vocational pathways in occupational hygiene, cultural mentoring, community liaison and employment support.

Barriers and concerns raised: An assumption in previous approaches that operational mining roles suit everyone, placing pressure on some to pursue work misaligned with their interests, cultural obligations or lifestyles; an over-emphasis on conventional academic and trade qualifications over practical vocational pathways; limited local training, financial constraints and the need to relocate for education; thin organisational capacity within Traditional Owner organisations and PBCs; and healthcare access concentrated in coastal centres that draws families away permanently.

Supports sought: Free, prior and informed consent sought early, before key decisions are made, informed by joint documentation of Country during exploration and pre-feasibility — building local capability and establishing baselines against which rehabilitation and closure can later be measured. Employment approached as a whole-of-life-cycle journey rather than recruitment alone; comprehensive HR frameworks recognising cultural and kinship obligations; industry–government–school–provider collaboration on vocational training; and stronger regional health and wellbeing services designed with Traditional Owner organisations.

Outcomes to be avoided: Consultation undertaken after key decisions are made; being pushed toward operational mining roles regardless of fit; reliance on PBCs alone to carry engagement without resourcing or partnership; and development that generates economic activity without lasting improvements in community wealth.

Governance and decision-making: A two-tier architecture pairing formal agreement-making with representative bodies alongside standing, open community engagement — recognising that engagement focused primarily on representative bodies may not capture the views of young people, women, Elders and community members living away from country. Engagement should be partnership-based, with proponents co-designing engagement with PBCs and resourcing them to reach the wider community.



“We need to be involved for the full lifecycle of any project, from early works to rehabilitation.”

Yulluna People

ZONE / AREA: CMZ 1 — SOUTH-WEST OF CLONCURRY.
NATIVE TITLE STATUS: DETERMINED (2014).

Economic aspirations: Employment for local Yulluna men and women secured as enforceable commitments within legally binding agreements, negotiated through the group's own legal representatives rather than resting on good-faith arrangements dependent on company goodwill — so that benefits from development on Country reach Yulluna people directly.

Opportunities identified: Legally binding agreements with enforceable employment and training provisions were identified as the pathway to Yulluna participation in critical minerals development. Existing education sponsorships supporting up to 70 local school children were noted as a foundation that could be built upon. The Cultural Heritage Management Agreement framework — currently the only binding obligation in place — has protected many significant sites and offers a working model for what enforceable commitments can achieve.

Barriers and concerns raised: Foundational agreements for mining in the Cloncurry area were struck before the 2014 determination, with operations commencing in 1997, leaving no relationship agreement supporting Traditional Owner employment; subsequent operators were described as following the same pattern. Historical agreements exchanging consent for employment and training commitments were reported as not honoured, with good-faith arrangements providing no legal standing for enforcement. Available work was described as flowing to external subcontractors and FIFO workforces rather than local Traditional Owners, with no procurement participation mechanism in place for Yulluna enterprises. Current company contributions — annual white goods for Elders, annual Elders payments and education sponsorships — are good-faith arrangements rather than agreement-based benefits.

Supports sought: Legally binding participation agreements with enforceable employment, training and procurement provisions, negotiated through independent legal representation for the group; and recognition of the Cultural Heritage Management Agreement framework, noting that significant sites were also lost in earlier years of operation.

Outcomes to be avoided: Good-faith or otherwise unenforceable arrangements substituting for binding agreements; goodwill gestures in place of secured employment and participation; and continuation of arrangements under which Traditional Owners are excluded from work on their own Country.



“Education sponsorships, supporting our children, are vital.”

Governance and decision-making: The Yulluna Aboriginal Corporation, incorporated in Cloncurry in 2017, reported pressure from community members over outcomes the PBC has no legal capacity to deliver — a gap between community expectations and the PBC's actual legal remit that proponents should understand when engaging. Elders have indicated that future agreements will not be entered into without legally binding terms; trust in negotiation processes is depleted and will need to be rebuilt through enforceable commitments. Participants linked limited employment access to broader social and wellbeing pressures in the community, described as widening rather than closing.

Waanyi People

ZONE / AREA: CMZ 1 — NORTH-WEST (ENGAGED IN TOWNSVILLE).
NATIVE TITLE STATUS: DETERMINED; REPRESENTED BY THE WAANYI NATIVE TITLE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION.



“Please leave the place as you found it.”

Economic aspirations: Genuine opportunity for Waanyi people to negotiate and participate in economic activity on country, supported by an enduring funding base that keeps Waanyi businesses viable and enables expansion into land care, ranger services, parks and wildlife, and cultural heritage work. Aspirations centred on the next

generation: structured pathways from school into trade training camps, TAFE and employment, and young people growing up in households where working family members normalise employment.

Opportunities identified: A standing trust account — funded by proponents as shareholders to Traditional Owners, alongside government, and independent of grant cycles — to sustain and grow Waanyi enterprise; and a prison-release program back on country, framed as restorative justice supporting local industry, jobs, families and community pride. Trade-training camps and TAFE were identified as practical entry routes for young people, and structured after-school activities as preventive investment.

Barriers and concerns raised: Indigenous businesses receiving only small, short work packages while larger contracts are outsourced to non-Indigenous and capital-city firms; local people overlooked for entry-level roles; and a lack of support to sustain employment once gained. Transport, stable housing, and the cost of licences and tickets were named as preconditions for work. The frequency of bereavement in community is often disbelieved by employers and standard leave is inadequate. Participants also observed that representative structures have not always reached every clan group, and that out-migration erodes the support networks young people rely on.

Supports sought: Proponent-funded, enduring trust structures independent of government grant cycles; genuine local-first hiring and retention support; social supports currently reported as absent; and engagement that meets Traditional Owners where they live, including Townsville as a regional hub. Workplace policies that embed First Nations cultural practices, including adequate Sorry Business leave with planned backfill; and payment of Elders for cultural knowledge provided to organisations.

Outcomes to be avoided: Token or short-term work packages that do not build sustainable enterprises; procurement bypassing capable Indigenous businesses; and engagement limited to on-country locations that misses rights-holders living away. The destruction of the Juukan Gorge rock shelters was cited as the outcome to be avoided above all others, with documented cultural sites to be expressly protected.

Governance and decision-making: A model in which a representative body, together with an additional community board voted by the people, has the right to sit at the negotiation table — so that engagement reaches all Traditional Owner groups, not only some family groups. Custodians are the decision-makers for Country: proponents should approach local Traditional Owners first for permission, and where a proponent's intentions are not in agreement with the community, the community's answer stands.

Balarnu Waluwarra Wangkayujuru Aboriginal Corporation (BWWAC)

ZONE / AREA: CMZ 1 — DAJARRA DISTRICT.

***Note:** Engagement with the Balarnu Waluwarra Wangkayujuru Aboriginal Corporation (BWWAC) had not been completed at the time of reporting.*

Indjalandji-Dhadhanu People

ZONE / AREA: CMZ 1 — CAMOOWEAL / WEST OF MOUNT ISA.

NATIVE TITLE STATUS: NTAC.

***Note:** Engagement with the Indjalandji-Dhadhanu People had not been completed at the time of reporting.*

8.2 Cross-Cutting Issues

Several issues were raised so consistently across groups and locations that they are best understood as region-wide, cutting across the thematic domains. Chief among them are: a strong and shared preference for enduring contracts and trust structures over grants and one-off arrangements; a call for engagement to reach all Traditional Owners, including common-law holders and families living away from country; the need for capacity-building so groups can establish and run their own corporations and trusts and negotiate as equals; opportunities in land, water, biodiversity and cultural enterprise well beyond operational mining roles; and out-migration to regional hubs as both a barrier to local participation and a wellbeing concern. The distinction between social impact and cultural impact, and the recognition of cultural authority independent of native title determination, also recurred across groups.

8.3 Out-of-Scope or Late-Received Feedback

Some matters raised by participants fall outside the economic-baseline scope of this Program but are recorded here and referred as appropriate, given their importance to participants. These include justice matters (including a proposed prison-release and restorative-justice program, and concern that youth justice laws limit Elders’ authority to guide young people); housing tenure and funding issues; and specific cultural-heritage and water-assessment concerns that participants considered inadequately addressed by current processes. Feedback received after the analysis cut-off will be incorporated in later revisions.





09

Interpretation of Findings

Sections 7 and 8 report what participants said. This section sets out an interpretation of that evidence, drawing the findings together with the secondary baseline in Sections 4 to 6.

The distinction is deliberate: the findings are the participants' own; the interpretation below is analytical, applying the framework described at Section 2.4, offered to assist the reader and open to their own judgement. It does not represent the position of the Queensland Government.

To assist reviewers in weighing the analysis, each interpretation below carries an indicative confidence level. High indicates a matter raised consistently across most or all groups engaged and, where relevant, corroborated by secondary data. Moderate indicates a matter raised consistently but by fewer groups, or resting mainly on engagement. Emerging indicates a matter raised strongly but by one or few participants, warranting further engagement before firm conclusions are drawn. These levels reflect the qualitative, thematic purpose of the Program described at Section 1.6, not statistical measurement.

9.1 The Central Interpretation: A Question of Connection, Not Capacity

Finding. Participants across groups described substantial aspiration and latent capability — in enterprise, on-country work and the workforce — alongside consistent barriers to realising it. The secondary baseline shows large resident First Nations populations in CMZ 1 and small resident populations in the CMZ 2 shires, with a resource workforce that is overwhelmingly non-resident.

Interpretation. Taken together, these suggest the central challenge is less a shortage of First Nations capacity or willingness than a set of disconnections: between the industries First Nations people currently work in and the industries that are growing; between an emerging young workforce and the training that would ready it; and between the larger First Nations populations of CMZ 1 and opportunities across the wider region. On this reading, the opportunity lies less in building capacity assumed to be absent, and more in connecting capacity that already exists to opportunity.

INDICATIVE CONFIDENCE: HIGH.

9.2 Participation Is Unlikely to Occur by Default

Finding. Participants reported FIFO recruitment drawing labour from outside the region, local people overlooked for entry-level roles, procurement awarding small and short packages while larger contracts go to non-local firms, and a lack of support to sustain employment. The secondary data records a resource workforce that is up to 93.6% non-resident.

Interpretation. These responses, corroborated by the workforce data, suggest that the market structures of the region work against First Nations participation unless deliberately countered — through local-first recruitment, retention support, and procurement structured to grow businesses. This is consistent with the intent of the SSRC Act provisions discussed at Section 10.

INDICATIVE CONFIDENCE: HIGH.

9.3 The Opportunity Appears to Lie Well Beyond Mining Jobs

Finding. Participants across groups identified enterprise opportunities in biodiversity, land and water management, ranger work, revegetation, grazing and cultural services, and several cautioned against assuming operational mining roles suit everyone.

Interpretation. This suggests that a workforce-and-procurement strategy focused narrowly on operational mining roles would capture only part of the available participation, and may not align with what many participants want. A broader framing — encompassing on-country enterprise and Traditional Owner-governed services matched to proponents’ environmental and cultural-heritage needs — appears more likely to succeed.

INDICATIVE CONFIDENCE: HIGH.

9.4 Enduring Structures Appear Preferred Over One-Off Arrangements

Finding. Participants across groups expressed a consistent preference for enduring contracts and relationship agreements, and for standing trust structures funded by proponents alongside government, over grants and one-off deals.

Interpretation. This indicates that the durability and governance of benefit arrangements matter to participants as much as their quantum, and that arrangements designed to persist across projects and changes of government may build more trust and lasting benefit than transactional or grant-based approaches.

INDICATIVE CONFIDENCE: HIGH.

9.5 Engagement Legitimacy Appears to Rest on Reach and Cultural Authority

Finding. Participants asked that engagement reach all Traditional Owners — including common-law holders and families living away from country — and run directly through Elders and recognised Traditional Owners, not representative bodies alone. Views on representative structures reflected a perceived gap between corporate representation and cultural authority.

Interpretation. This suggests that engagement confined to formal structures risks missing rights-holders and eroding legitimacy, and that reaching people where they live and recognising cultural authority independent of determination status would strengthen both. The Program’s own scope principle reflects this. Individual groups differed in emphasis, and the specific position of any group should be confirmed directly.

INDICATIVE CONFIDENCE: HIGH.

9.6 Commercial Capacity Appears to Be the Binding Constraint on Enterprise

Finding. Participants described the difficulty, cost and slowness of establishing and running corporations and trusts, and reliance on external professional advice, as a constraint on participating commercially and negotiating as equals.

Interpretation. This suggests that capacity-building — governance, business systems and affordable professional advice — is a precondition for enterprise and procurement participation, and that investment here may be a prerequisite for other measures to succeed rather than an optional addition.

INDICATIVE CONFIDENCE: MODERATE.

9.7 Out-Migration May Be Eroding Local Participation and Connection

Finding. Participants described families relocating to regional hubs for health, housing and education, often permanently, with a resulting loss of skills, leadership and connection to country.

Interpretation. This suggests that regional liveability — health, housing and education — bears directly on whether communities retain the people needed to participate in economic opportunity, and that maintaining connection for families living away is both a wellbeing and an economic-participation matter. This was raised strongly, though by fewer groups.

INDICATIVE CONFIDENCE: MODERATE.

9.8 Cultural Impact May Be Distinct From Social Impact

Finding. Participants noted that social impact assessment involves First Nations people but does not extensively assess the cultural impacts a proponent may bring, and that cultural impact is a distinct matter. In a second, more detailed session, one participant developed this position as a considered statutory argument rather than a general impression: the Environmental Protection Act 1994 (Qld) defines “environment” to include the social, economic, aesthetic and cultural conditions affected by development, yet Aboriginal cultural value is not recognised as property — tangible or intangible — when remedies for impairment or loss are determined. Because Aboriginal social structures are shaped by cultural tenure systems, disruption of cultural flows was described as capable of causing trauma and spiritual, physical and mental harm. The participant also queried how section 28 of the Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld) — the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples — is reflected in the SIA process.

Interpretation. This suggests that an SIA alone may not fully capture cultural impact, and that proponents may benefit from a dedicated cultural-impact lens alongside the SIA. It is noted that the OCG’s SIA Guideline: Supplementary Material (July 2025) includes a dedicated section on First Nations Peoples (Section 4) setting out expectations for the consideration of cultural matters in SIA consultation, including linkages with native title, Cultural Heritage Management Plans and Social Impact Management Plans; and that cultural heritage is separately assessed through a dedicated EIS chapter, distinct from the SIA, addressing both First Nations and non-Indigenous cultural heritage. The engagement findings may therefore reflect, in part, a gap between guidance expectations and participants’ experience of assessment practice, and an awareness gap regarding the Supplementary Material itself — supporting broader promotion of that guidance among proponents and First Nations communities alike. This was raised sharply by a small number of participants — in one case developed in depth across two sessions — and warrants further engagement.

INDICATIVE CONFIDENCE: EMERGING.

9.9 Specific Proposals Warranting Further Engagement

Finding. Individual participants advanced specific proposals — including a trade pathway bringing First Nations women into diesel-fitting roles, a prison-release program framed as restorative justice, and a Traditional Owner-governed biodiversity company.

Interpretation. These are valuable, concrete ideas that merit consideration, but as single-participant proposals they are recorded as emerging rather than settled findings. They would benefit from testing with the broader community before being relied upon.

INDICATIVE CONFIDENCE: EMERGING.





10

Alignment with OCG SIA Requirements

10.1 Overview of SIA Alignment

This Program is designed to function as a proponent-ready input to Social Impact Assessment. While it is not itself an SIA, it produces a First Nations economic evidence base that maps directly onto the requirements proponents must satisfy. Under the Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Act 2017 (SSRC Act), addressing the SIA key matters is a statutory requirement for large resource projects — and as of 2025 the SIA process is also statutory under the Planning Act 2016, extending the same discipline to prescribed developments including large-scale wind and solar.

The alignment rests on a shared purpose. The object of the SSRC Act is to ensure that residents of communities near large resource projects benefit from the construction and operation of those projects. First Nations economic participation is central to that object across the CMZs.

The Guideline also makes First Nations peoples an explicit consideration: among its SIA principles, the participatory principle requires that engagement be inclusive, respectful, meaningful and tailored to the needs of potentially impacted individuals and groups, including special consideration of the needs of First Nations peoples and marginalised groups. This Program operationalises that principle at the zone level, in advance, so that proponents inherit a culturally validated evidence base rather than building one from scratch.

10.2 Mapping to the Five SIA Key Matters

The SIA Guideline (July 2025) requires that an SIA address five key matters: community and stakeholder engagement; workforce management; housing and accommodation; local business and industry procurement; and health and community well-being. This Program's findings map to those matters as follows:

- **Community and stakeholder engagement.** The Program's stakeholder profile (Section 3), its First Nations-led engagement methodology (Section 2), and its documentation of cultural authority structures, protocols and internal governance complexities provide a ready foundation for the engagement key matter — identifying who must be engaged, how, and with what cultural protocols.
- **Workforce management.** The Program's analysis of First Nations employment, the FIFO/DIDO dynamic, the small resident base in the CMZ 2 shires, and training and capability needs (Sections 4–6) speaks directly to workforce management — including the SSRC Act's recruitment-hierarchy and anti-FIFO provisions discussed at 10.4.
- **Housing and accommodation.** The Program's baseline on First Nations household conditions, housing stock and unoccupancy across the LGAs (Section 4) provides First Nations-specific context for the housing key matter, including the interaction between non-resident workforces and local housing pressure.

- **Local business and industry procurement.** The Program's enterprise and procurement findings — particularly the gap between the registered (directory-listed) and actual First Nations enterprise base, and examples such as Myuma (Sections 3, 5, 6) — directly inform the procurement key matter and guard against directory-based supplier searches understating local capability.
- **Health and community well-being.** The Program's findings on economic aspirations, community priorities, and the supports, preferred outcomes and outcomes to be avoided that First Nations people identify inform the well-being key matter, grounding it in First Nations-defined measures rather than externally imposed ones.

A detailed, row-by-row crosswalk linking specific Program findings to each key matter is provided at Appendix E.

10.3 Guidance for Proponents

For proponents preparing an SIA for a project in the CMZs, this Program offers four practical uses. First, it identifies the First Nations stakeholders and cultural authority structures relevant to each zone, with protocols, before first contact — reducing the risk of inappropriate or duplicative approaches. Second, it supplies a zone-level First Nations economic baseline that proponents can cite and build on, rather than commissioning independently. Third, it surfaces First Nations enterprises that national supplier directories miss, expanding the realistic procurement pool. Fourth, it records the preferred outcomes and outcomes to be avoided that First Nations people have identified, allowing proponents to align commitments with community-defined outcomes. Used together, these shorten assessment timeframes and improve the quality and consistency of the First Nations evidence on which the Coordinator-General's evaluation depends — while reducing the engagement burden carried by communities.

10.4 SSRC Act Compliance

Beyond the five key matters, the SSRC Act contains specific provisions that bear directly on First Nations economic participation, and to which this Program's findings are especially relevant. The Act prohibits 100 per cent fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) workforce arrangements on operational large resource projects, prevents discrimination against locals in the recruitment of workers, and requires adoption of a recruitment hierarchy that prioritises recruitment from local and regional communities first. Given the overwhelmingly non-resident resource workforce documented at Section 5, these provisions are the principal statutory levers relevant to First Nations workforce participation. This Program's baseline — locating the large resident First Nations populations in CMZ 1 and the small resident base in the CMZ 2 shires — provides an evidence base relevant to the recruitment hierarchy and anti-FIFO provisions and how they may reach First Nations communities across the wider region. Most projects in the CMZs are likely to meet the Act's large-resource-project threshold (an EIS-assessed project, or a site-specific environmental authority with 100 or more workers), bringing these obligations into play.

10.5 Baseline Re-use

A central feature of this Program is that it is built once and can be re-used many times. Rather than each proponent independently engaging the same First Nations communities for the same baseline information — exposing communities to repeated, overlapping consultation — the Program provides a shared zone-level First Nations economic baseline that multiple proponents can draw on. This mirrors the CMZ framework's logic of shared social, water and environmental baselines, extending it to the First Nations economic dimension. Re-use is subject to two conditions consistent with the Program's ethics: the baseline informs but does not replace project-specific engagement where a proponent's activities directly affect a particular group; and the data sovereignty principles of Section 2.6 continue to apply, so that the baseline is used in a manner respectful of the communities whose knowledge it reflects. Used this way, the Program can reduce cost and assessment time for proponents, reduce consultation fatigue for communities, and support greater consistency of First Nations evidence across the zones — the core of its proponent-ready design.

11

Recommendations

The following points follow from the baseline and the engagement findings, and are framed around a single principle: this Program has already undertaken zone-level First Nations economic engagement, so proponents can draw on it rather than repeat it.

They are directed at proponents, who carry the primary engagement and assessment obligations in the CMZs. They are framed as options informed by engagement — not as policy or direction.

11.1 For Industry Proponents

Proponents are the primary audience for these points. Engagement indicated that proponents would benefit from a set of practical actions that can be taken now, drawing on this baseline:

- **Use this baseline rather than re-commissioning it.** The zone-level First Nations economic engagement, stakeholder profile and cultural-authority mapping in this report can be cited and summarised for relevant groups. Proponents can summarise the group-specific outcomes of this report and check them for accuracy with the relevant groups, minimising the need to obtain the same baseline information for each project (Sections 3, 7, 8).
- **Search for First Nations suppliers regionally, not locally.** Because relevant First Nations enterprises are concentrated across Mount Isa and North West Queensland rather than in the immediate project localities, and because single-directory searches understate the base, proponents should identify suppliers at a regional scale and through direct engagement (Sections 5.3, 6.2). Directory listings (including Supply Nation and Black Business Finder) should be treated as a starting point rather than a definitive record: capable enterprises operate without appearing on either. Additional identification channels include ICN Queensland's Gateway, the DSDIP North West Queensland Regional Office and DWATSIPM supplier lists, and the Jobs North West Queensland Business Directory. Funding a targeted regional supplier search would surface unlisted businesses and identify capability gaps that could seed new Traditional Owner-led enterprises. Where endorsement of a business's First Nations status is sought, the appropriate endorsement pathway should be confirmed early with the relevant groups, as endorsement arrangements vary and can be contested.
- **Design procurement to grow businesses, not allocate token packages.** Longer contract horizons, genuine roles in joint ventures, and contract structuring that allows emerging First Nations enterprises to compete responds directly to the procurement barriers participants identified (Sections 5.4, 7.4). Breaking large packages into smaller, longer-term contracts increases local participation where tier-one and tier-two contracting would otherwise exclude smaller local firms; and where head contractors commit at pre-bid stage to engaging local subcontractors, those commitments can be structured so that delivery is reported against them.

- **Recruit and retain locally, with support to stay — including stable housing assistance, mentoring, and workplace flexibility that recognises cultural and family obligations.** Local-first recruitment consistent with the SSRC Act recruitment hierarchy, paired with cultural-safety and retention support, addresses the finding that gaining a job is not the barrier — keeping one is (Sections 5.2, 7.4).
- **Report transparently on First Nations employment and spend.** Public reporting of Traditional Owner employment and procurement outcomes supports accountability and enables communities to see delivery against commitments. Participants were clear, however, that quotas and targets are not themselves the measure of equity — which they described as measured through a genuine sense of value (Section 7.2) — so reporting should serve transparency rather than substitute for genuine outcomes.
- **Offer a spectrum of pathways beyond operational mining —** including on-country roles (ranger, biodiversity, rehabilitation, water), trades, and professional and enterprise pathways — reflecting participants' caution that mining roles do not suit everyone (Sections 7.3, 7.6).
- **Engage early, embed capacity, and draw on the common framework at 11.3.** Onboarding and training ahead of construction, dedicated Indigenous engagement capacity within operations, and drawing on the community-informed framework may reduce the risk and rework of getting engagement wrong.

PRIORITY ACTIONS AND INDICATIVE TIMEFRAMES

The following actions were identified as the highest priorities across the baseline and engagement. They are sequenced to align with the typical development timeline, so that enabling steps precede project ramp-up.

Priority action	Indicative timing	Primary lead
Draw on this baseline and a possible common engagement framework in project planning	Immediate / pre-EIS	Proponent
Identify First Nations suppliers regionally; begin early supplier engagement	Pre-construction	Proponent
Begin accredited training aligned to real roles, ahead of construction	12–24 months pre-construction	Proponent, with training providers
Apply SSRC Act recruitment hierarchy and local-first recruitment	Construction onward	Proponent
Support Traditional Owner enterprise and capacity-building (e.g. biodiversity, land and water services)	Pre-construction, ongoing	Proponent, with community organisations
Establish enduring engagement and benefit structures (contracts, trusts)	Agreement-making stage	Proponent, with Traditional Owner groups

Leads and timing are indicative and framed to fit existing project and regulatory processes; the table is intended to help proponents sequence action, not to create new obligations on government.

11.2 For First Nations Communities and Organisations

These points reflect what participants themselves identified as enabling their participation, and are included so that community-side supports are visible to proponents and government considering how to respond:

- **Support to build organisational and commercial capacity** — to establish and run corporations and trusts, and to access quality legal, accounting and taxation advice — was the most consistently identified precondition for equitable participation (Sections 5.6, 7.5).
- **Traditional Owner-governed enterprise vehicles** — including the biodiversity-company model participants proposed — position groups as authoritative providers of services proponents require, rather than as suppliers of labour under others' direction (Sections 5.3, 7.3).
- **Regional and cross-group collaboration**, and the standing engagement structures participants proposed, can strengthen the collective position of First Nations groups in dealing with proponents and government.

11.3 A Possible Common Engagement Framework

A recurring proposal raised by participants was that this report could form the basis of a common engagement framework for the region — helping proponents draw on a clear, community-informed approach rather than working it out project by project. Framed this way, it is a burden-reducing measure: drawing on a shared framework may reduce the risk, cost and rework of engagement done poorly, and spare communities repeated, inconsistent approaches. The following preferences, expressed by participants across the engagement, indicate what such a framework could reflect:

- **Reach all Traditional Owners** — including common-law holders and families outside formal native title structures — not representative bodies alone (Sections 7.7, 8.1).
- **Meet people where they live** — including regional hubs such as Townsville, where a substantial Traditional Owner population now resides — not on country alone (Section 8.2).
- Engage early and seek free, prior and informed consent before key decisions are made, rather than consulting after the fact (Section 7.6).
- **Recognise cultural authority** — including kinship and succession under traditional law — as the basis of engagement legitimacy, and respect cultural protocols (Section 2.1).
- **Distinguish cultural impact from social impact** — recognising that cultural impact is not fully captured by an SIA and warrants its own attention. Participants identified practical capture mechanisms: mapping of Country — water systems, soil, flora and fauna — ahead of disturbance; clear identification of remedies for impairment or loss; and due diligence and procedural fairness in mapping cultural rights and interests, consistent with the expectations of the OCG SIA Guideline: Supplementary Material (July 2025), Section 4.
- **Use Traditional Owners, not external consultants, for cultural and engagement roles** (Section 7.6).
- **Treat engagement as enduring** — through relationship agreements and communication channels that persist across projects and changes of government or proponent — rather than as one-off consultation (Section 7.5).

Drawing on such a framework may help a proponent demonstrate, efficiently and consistently, that its engagement reflects the preferences participants expressed — using a reference the Program has already prepared.

11.4 Collaboration as a shared expectation

The CMZ framework already concentrates shared baseline studies and coordinated support in these zones. It is the natural vehicle through which an expectation of collaboration could be signalled to proponents, early and consistently, so that it is understood at project planning rather than negotiated afterwards. What participants described was not a preference for tidier process but a clear account of what uncoordinated engagement costs them: the same groups approached repeatedly for substantially the same information, each approach starting again from the beginning, consultation fatigue and engagement that reads as procedural rather than genuine (Sections 1.5, 7.3, 7.5). Collaboration, between proponents and with the Traditional Owner groups concerned, is the direct answer to that. Two limbs are relevant:

- **Engagement.** That proponents should collaborate in the design, delivery, resourcing and sharing of First Nations engagement across the zone, designed with the groups concerned rather than presented to them, rather than each conducting the same engagement independently (Section 11.3).
- **Legacy and regional works.** That proponents should collaborate in the design, resourcing and delivery of legacy commitments and on-country programs, so that those commitments can operate at zone or district scale.

The logic that underpins this baseline, built once and re-used many times (Section 10.5), can be applied to what proponents commit to, not only to how they engage. Across the engagement, participants consistently preferred enduring, pooled and independently governed arrangements over grants and one-off commitments (Sections 7.5, 7.6, 9.4): funding for ranger programs supported by proper award structures rather than grant reliance, and relationship agreements running for the life of a mine.

On-country work, including ranger programs, biodiversity survey and management, land and water management, revegetation and rehabilitation, was the most consistently identified opportunity across every group engaged (Sections 7.4, 9.3), and the enterprise model most often proposed was Traditional Owner-governed rather than labour-supplying (Sections 5.3, 11.2). This work operates at landscape scale and rarely at the scale of a single tenure. Collaboration is therefore the practical route to delivering it, and to the continuity and Traditional Owner governance participants asked for.

Collaboration on this basis does not displace project-specific agreements where a proponent's activities directly affect a particular group, or the native title, cultural heritage and free, prior and informed consent processes that sit with the relevant groups and their own structures.

Appendix A — Engagement Schedule and Session Records

This appendix records the engagement sessions undertaken through the Program. Consistent with the privacy and data sovereignty principles at Sections 2.5 and 2.6, sessions are recorded by Traditional Owner group, method and location rather than by participant name. Detailed session notes are held securely by Relay Communications and are not reproduced here. The schedule below reflects engagement completed.

#	Traditional Owner group	Method	Location	Date
1	Kalkadoon	Virtual meeting	-	March 2026
2	Waluwarra / Mitakoodi and Mayi (and others)	In person	Mount Isa	May 2026
3	Kalkadoon / Mitakoodi	In person	Mount Isa	May 2026
4	Waluwarra (and Yirendali)	In-person interview	Townsville	April 2026
5	Wanamara	In-person interview	Richmond	April 2026
6	Mitakoodi and Mayi	In person	Cloncurry	July 2026
7	Waanyi	In-person interview	Townsville	June 2026
8	Mitakoodi and Mayi	In-person interview	Cloncurry	July 2026
9	Yulluna	Virtual meeting	-	July 2026
10	Waanyi	In-person interview	Townsville	July 2026
11	Waluwarra / Ngawun / Yirendali (second session)	In person	Mount Isa	July 2026

Appendix B — Conversation Guide Framework

The Program’s engagement used conversation guides rather than formal survey instruments, reflecting the oral traditions and conversational communication preferences of many First Nations communities. Facilitators worked from a small set of open prompts organised around six thematic domains, adapting the wording, order and depth to each conversation. This approach was chosen to allow participants to share views in their own words and at their own pace (cultural appropriateness); to let facilitators adapt to context and participant comfort (flexibility); to support exploration of emergent and unexpected themes (depth); and to respect participant choice in what and how much to share (participant agency).

The six domains, and the indicative prompts used to open each, are set out below. The same six domains structure the thematic analysis in Section 7 and the by-group findings in Section 8, so that what was asked, how it was analysed, and how it is reported all align.

Theme domain	Indicative prompt	Purpose
Economic aspirations	<i>What kinds of work, business or training opportunities would you like to see?</i>	Identify desired opportunities, sector preferences and aspirational outcomes
Skills and readiness	<i>What training or skills would support people to take up new work?</i>	Identify training gaps, skills-development needs and workforce readiness
Barriers to participation	<i>What makes it difficult for people to take up opportunities?</i>	Identify structural, cultural and practical constraints
Support needs	<i>What support would make participation easier?</i>	Identify government and industry supports and program-design input
Outcomes to be avoided	<i>What should government and industry avoid doing?</i>	Identify boundaries, cultural sensitivities and past negative experiences
Governance and decision-making	<i>How should engagement occur to be respectful and effective?</i>	Identify preferred engagement protocols and decision-making structures

Prompts were used as conversation openers, not as a fixed questionnaire. Facilitators followed the direction set by participants, returned to domains not yet covered where appropriate, and did not require any participant to address every domain. Consistent with the cultural protocols at Section 2.1, cultural obligations took precedence over the guide at all times, and no participant was pressed to respond on any matter.

Appendix C — Stakeholder Categorisation Tool

The Program used a stakeholder categorisation framework to ensure engagement was appropriately targeted, culturally safe, and comprehensive across the range of First Nations interests connected to the CMZs. Each stakeholder in the Register was assigned to one of eight categories, which informed the engagement method, cultural protocols and priority applied. Consistent with the Program’s scope, the framework recognises interests beyond formal native title — including cultural authority, residency and economic stake — so that engagement reaches all First Nations Peoples connected to the zones.

Category	Description	Key considerations	Typical method	Priority
Traditional Owner	First Nations Peoples with cultural authority for Country within the CMZs	Cultural authority hierarchy; gender protocols; Welcome to Country	On-Country meetings; yarning circles	Critical
Elder / Cultural Authority	Senior knowledge holders with recognised cultural standing	Gender considerations; ceremony obligations; oral traditions	Individual meetings; yarning	Critical
Native Title Holder	Groups with registered determinations (e.g. Mitakoodi and Mayi, Yulluna, Kalkadoon)	PBC as legal entity; ILUA requirements; formal notification	Formal meetings; PBC liaison	Critical
Native Title Claimant	Groups with active but undetermined claims	NTRB coordination; claim-boundary awareness; procedural rights	NTRB-facilitated; formal engagement	High
First Nations Resident	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people residing in CMZ communities	Cultural obligations to home Country; local knowledge; service access	Community meetings; informal discussion	High
First Nations Business	Indigenous-owned businesses and PBC commercial entities	Supply-chain opportunities; capacity; certification	One-on-one	High
Community Organisation	Land councils, health, housing and other services	Service-delivery networks; referral pathways; Closing the Gap alignment	Meetings with representatives	Medium
Workforce / Jobseeker	First Nations individuals seeking employment or skills development	Training access; employment barriers; transport; cultural leave	Youth sessions; informal groups	Medium

Cultural protocols were applied to every category, ranging from senior engagement first and gender-appropriate facilitators for Traditional Owners and Elders, through PBC governance structures for native title holders, to accessible language and flexible timing for workforce and jobseeker participants. A person could hold several categories at once — a Traditional Owner who is also an Elder and a business owner, for example — and the framework treats these overlapping identities as complementary rather than exclusive.

Appendix D — Data Sources and References

This appendix lists the principal secondary sources drawn on in the Program. Primary data comprises the engagement records described in Appendix A; these are stored securely and are not reproduced. Consistent with Section 2.3, secondary sources were used to establish baseline metrics, provide regional context, and triangulate the engagement findings.

Legislation and government policy

- Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Act 2017 (Qld)
- Planning Act 2016 (Qld)
- Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld)
- Office of the Coordinator-General, Social Impact Assessment Guideline (July 2025)
- Queensland Government, Queensland Critical Minerals Strategy (2023)

Statistical and demographic sources

- Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing (2021) — General and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Profiles and QuickStats, for the Mount Isa, Cloncurry, McKinlay and Richmond local government areas
- Queensland Government Statistician’s Office (QGSO) — regional population projections and profiles
- National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) — program and labour-market data

Native title and cultural authority

- National Native Title Tribunal — Register of Native Title Determinations and Register of Native Title Claims
- Determination records for the Kalkadoon, Mitakoodi and Mayi, and Yulluna peoples

Regional baseline and comparative studies

- EMM Consulting, Julia Creek/Richmond Critical Minerals Zone Social Baseline Study (prepared for the Department, July 2025)

First Nations business directories

- Supply Nation — Indigenous Business Direct
- Black Business Finder (Indigenous Chamber of Commerce)

Ethical and methodological references

- AIATSIS, Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020)
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), ‘Using thematic analysis in psychology’, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101

Appendix E — OCG SIA Data Crosswalk Table

This crosswalk maps the Program’s findings to the five key matters of the Coordinator-General’s SIA Guideline (July 2025), to assist proponents in re-using the baseline for their own SIA. Report-section references are provided; the evidence column draws on the findings in Sections 5, 7 and 8.

SIA key matter (July 2025)	What the key matter requires	Program evidence	Report ref.
Community and stakeholder engagement	Identification of stakeholders and inclusive, respectful, culturally tailored engagement, with special consideration of First Nations peoples.	Culturally authorised engagement across the Traditional Owner groups of both zones, with engagement status recorded per group (S3.5, S8.1). Engagement preferences expressed by participants — reach all Traditional Owners including common-law holders, meet people where they live, early FPIC, recognition of cultural authority — and a proposed common engagement framework (S7, S11.3). Cultural impact distinguished from social impact, with reference to the SIA Supplementary Material (S9.8).	S3, S7, S8, S9, S11
Workforce management	Workforce planning including the recruitment hierarchy (local/regional first) and the prohibition on 100% FIFO for operational large resource projects.	Employment barriers and enablers from direct engagement: local-first recruitment and retention support, pre-employment barriers (transport, housing stability, licences), workplace cultural safety including accommodation of Sorry Business and kinship obligations, and training pathways ahead of construction (S5, S7, S8). Non-resident workforce and FIFO context (S4, S6.5).	S4, S5, S6, S7, S8
Housing and accommodation	Assessment of project effects on housing and accommodation, including interaction with non-resident workforce demand.	Housing pressures and interaction with non-resident workforce demand by LGA (S4). Housing as a precondition for employment and an anchor of permanent out-migration; land tenure barriers to Aboriginal freehold raised in engagement (S6.5, S8.1).	S4, S6, S8
Local business and industry procurement	Identification of local and First Nations businesses and measures to enable their participation in project supply chains.	Regional First Nations enterprise base and identification channels, with verification caveats (S3.3, S5.3). Procurement barriers reported in engagement — small short packages, outsourcing past capable local enterprises — and responses: contract disaggregation, enterprise-growth procurement design, Traditional Owner-governed enterprise models (S5.4, S7, S8, S11.1).	S3, S5, S6, S7, S8, S11
Health and community well-being	Assessment of effects on community health and well-being, grounded in community-defined priorities and outcomes.	Community-defined wellbeing priorities from engagement: cultural continuity, water and Country health, youth investment and structured activity, family cohesion, and the cumulative grief burden of Sorry Business (S7, S8). Linkage of economic exclusion to compounding wellbeing pressures, and wellbeing as an economic enabler (S8, S9).	S7, S8, S9

This appendix sets out the privacy, consent and data-governance framework applied throughout the Program. It operationalises the principles described at Sections 2.5 and 2.6, and reflects compliance with the Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld), the confidentiality requirements of the contract, and the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020).

Informed consent

- Informed consent was obtained from every participant before any data was collected.
- Participation was voluntary, and participants could decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time, without reason and without consequence.
- The purpose of the Program, how information would be used, and how it would be reported were explained to participants before engagement.

Recording and data capture

- Audio or video recording occurred only with separate, explicit consent.
- Any recording was used solely for internal transcription and accuracy, and was never reproduced in any deliverable or public-facing material.
- Where participants directed that particular matters not be recorded, those directions were followed.

Storage and access

- Data was stored securely, with access restricted to authorised project personnel.
- Personal identifiers were removed before analysis.
- Detailed session records are retained securely by Relay Communications and are not reproduced in this report.

De-identification and reporting

- Findings are reported in aggregate — by Traditional Owner group, category or location — rather than by individual.
- Illustrative perspectives are attributed to a group or category (for example, “a Wanamara participant”), never to a named person.
- All content was reviewed for cultural sensitivity before publication.

First Nations data sovereignty

- Participants retained control over what they shared and how it was used.
- Culturally restricted knowledge was not recorded where participants so directed.
- Cultural authority guided what could be represented and how.
- Consistent with the AIATSIS Code, community knowledge is treated as belonging to the community, and this report is positioned as a shared resource that reflects — rather than appropriates — the voices of those who contributed.

Culturally sensitive content

- Culturally sensitive material received special handling in line with participants’ instructions.
- Where a matter raised was culturally restricted or outside the Program’s scope, it was recorded and referred appropriately rather than reproduced.

Appendix G — Acronyms and Definitions

ACRONYMS

Term	Meaning
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
CHMP	Cultural Heritage Management Plan
CMQ	Critical Minerals Queensland
CMZ	Critical Minerals Zone
DIDO	Drive-in, drive-out (workforce)
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FIFO	Fly-in, fly-out (workforce)
FPIC	Free, prior and informed consent
ILUA	Indigenous Land Use Agreement
LGA	Local Government Area
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NNTT	National Native Title Tribunal
NTAC	Native Title Aboriginal Corporation
NTRB	Native Title Representative Body
OCG	Office of the Coordinator-General
PBC	Prescribed Body Corporate
QGSO	Queensland Government Statistician’s Office
QPWS	Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
SSRC Act	Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Act 2017 (Qld)

KEY TERMS

- **Common-law holder** — a person who holds rights and interests in Country under traditional law and custom, whether or not native title has been formally determined.
- **Critical Minerals Zone (CMZ)** — a designated area in which the State concentrates support for critical-

minerals development; this Program covers CMZ 1 (Mount Isa/Cloncurry) and CMZ 2 (Julia Creek/ Richmond).

- **Cultural authority** — the standing to speak for Country under traditional law and custom, which exists independently of native title determination.
- **First Nations Peoples** — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; used generally throughout this report, with “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” reserved for statistical and legislative references.
- **Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC)** — the corporation established to hold or manage determined native title on behalf of a group.
- **Proponent** — a party proposing or operating a resource or development project subject to assessment.
- **Traditional Owner** — a First Nations person with cultural authority for Country within the CMZs.

Appendix H — Engagement Evidence by Location

This appendix presents the engagement evidence organised by location, to support proponents whose interest is defined by project geography. For each location it records the First Nations connection to that place, the participants’ own words (de-identified and attributed to a Traditional Owner group), and a short mapping of those words to the five key matters of the Coordinator-General’s SIA Guideline (July 2025). It is a primary-evidence companion to the thematic and by-group findings in Sections 7 and 8, allowing proponents to draw directly on the community’s voice when preparing their own assessments.

H.1 Mount Isa (Kalkadoon)

Connection to Country. Mount Isa sits on Kalkadoon Country and is the principal centre of CMZ 1. Engagement connected to Mount Isa was undertaken with Kalkadoon participants, including a Kalkadoon businesswoman and procurement specialist, and through further Kalkadoon engagement on recognition, representation and economic participation.

IN THEIR WORDS.

- On belonging as the real barrier: a Kalkadoon participant described walking into the mines as a child and finding them intimidating and unwelcoming — *“I don’t belong here... like a prison.”*
- On participation as stewardship: *“we can teach our people how we contribute from critical minerals”* — pairing extraction with responsibility for regeneration.
- On investment in people: *“if you can’t see it, you tend to forget about it”* — on the need for visible, consistent, community-facing entrepreneurship investment.
- On the trust deficit: *“we’re going to write this report, and then what? We’re just in a report”* — on decades of being studied without return, and the need for measurable outcomes.
- On engagement posture: *“How do you want to show up today?”* — offered as the opening question that creates a culturally safe space.
- On recognition: Kalkadoon participants raised strong concerns about the recognition and representation of Traditional Owners, noting that historical record-keeping — including name changes made by police — still complicates formal recognition today, and calling for a Kalkadoon council or board to provide regional leadership and governance.
- On economic benefit: participants sought benefit flowing directly to Traditional Owner families — including royalties and shares from mining operations, and rates and financial benefits reaching Traditional Owners directly — and preferred treaty-style agreements and stronger land-rights recognition over native title alone.

SIA key matter	What was said at this location
Community and stakeholder engagement	Begin by asking people how they wish to participate; carry the whole community’s voice, not only formal structures; treat aspiration as data; and use this report to set a regional engagement standard. Recognition of Traditional Owner identity and cultural authority is foundational; a Kalkadoon council or board was sought as a regional leadership vehicle.
Workforce management	The barrier is belonging and workplace culture, not aptitude. Proposed pathways include First Nations women into diesel-fitting and fitter-and-turner trades, and high-value technical and digital roles from school, with a build-up-and-return model that avoids permanent displacement.
Housing and accommodation	Not a direct focus of this engagement; the development-without-displacement model assumes communities that remain viable to return to.
Local business and industry procurement	Catalytic, patient investment works — early-stage backing set one participant’s business trajectory. Fund enterprise acceleration and design procurement to grow businesses rather than allocate token packages; intertribal trade was identified as a global opportunity. Direct benefit flow to Traditional Owner families through royalty and shareholding arrangements was sought.
Health and community well-being	Whole-of-community investment (events, clubs, shared community life) is remembered a generation later as psychosocial infrastructure; its loss was felt as community devastation. Sport, arts and travel support that defeats the geography barrier, and youth programs built on being seen and valued, were priorities.

H.2 Cloncurry and Julia Creek (Mitakoodi and Mayi; Yulluna)

Connection to Country. Mitakoodi and Mayi Country spans the Cloncurry and Julia Creek districts, across CMZ 1 and CMZ 2. Engagement was undertaken with two Mitakoodi and Mayi Traditional Owners — including an Elder — and through group engagement. The evidence below is presented in two parts: the first participant’s material, then a second participant whose contribution extends it, notably on workforce frameworks, environmental work across the mine lifecycle, and partnership-based engagement.

IN THEIR WORDS.

- On genuine participation: development should make First Nations people genuine participants in the regional economy rather than short-term beneficiaries of project expenditure, defining their own aspirations rather than having priorities set externally.
- On choice of pathways: participants cautioned against assuming operational mining roles suit everyone, noting previous approaches placed pressure on people to pursue work misaligned with their interests, cultural obligations or lifestyles, and called for a broader spectrum — entrepreneurship, professional services, environmental management, cultural enterprise, tourism, education and land stewardship.
- On knowledge as an economic asset: Traditional Owner knowledge of country was described as a recognised economic asset, directly matched to environmental monitoring, rehabilitation, water management and biodiversity work.
- On consent and trust: free, prior and informed consent sought early was described as fundamental, with consultation after key decisions identified as corrosive to confidence.
- On legacy: success was framed on intergenerational measures — business ownership, asset creation, educational attainment, wellbeing and the strength of regional First Nations institutions — beyond the operational life of any project.

SIA key matter	What was said at this location
Community and stakeholder engagement	Free, prior and informed consent sought early, before key decisions. A two-tier approach was proposed: formal agreement-making with representative bodies alongside standing, open community engagement — recognising that engagement centred on representative bodies may miss young people, women, Elders and people living away from country.
Workforce management	Present a genuine spectrum of pathways rather than defaulting to operational mining roles. Barriers were limited local training, financial constraints and forced relocation for education; the remedy is industry–government–school–provider collaboration on locally accessible pathways matched to future demand.
Housing and accommodation	Raised through population retention: relocation to coastal centres for healthcare becomes permanent, so regional liveability (health, housing, education) determines whether communities retain people, skills and future leaders.
Local business and industry procurement	Indigenous-owned businesses operating across the full supply chain — construction, operations, environmental management, cultural heritage, land management, transport and hospitality. Traditional Owner knowledge of country is an asset matched to proponent needs; the binding constraint is organisational capacity, so investment in governance and business capability is a precondition.
Health and community well-being	Healthcare access is a structural economic issue: specialist care concentrated in coastal centres draws families away permanently. Improved regional healthcare is both a wellbeing outcome and a retention strategy; wellbeing is tied to cultural continuity and to intergenerational legacy.

IN THEIR WORDS (SECOND PARTICIPANT).

- On the breadth of participation: economic participation extends well beyond employment and financial outcomes — strong families, cultural identity, community pride and individual wellbeing underpin the ability of First Nations people to take up economic opportunities.
- On vocational pathways: current approaches place too much emphasis on conventional academic and trade qualifications and overlook practical vocational pathways aligned with community strengths, with greater investment sought in certificate and diploma programs in occupational hygiene, biodiversity management, environmental monitoring, cultural mentoring, community liaison and employment support.
- On human resources as the enabler: cultural awareness training alone is insufficient for culturally safe workplaces; organisations need comprehensive HR frameworks — flexible policies recognising cultural

and kinship obligations, respectful communication, and workplaces where First Nations employees are not treated as token representatives or expected to speak for all Indigenous people.

- On employment as a life-cycle: employment should be seen as a whole-of-life-cycle experience — career inquiry, school engagement, work experience, mentoring, pre-employment, onboarding, progression, retention and transition — not beginning only at recruitment.
- On wrap-around support: many First Nations job seekers seek help from family, Elders and Traditional Owner organisations rather than conventional services, so stronger regional health and wellbeing services — with Traditional Owner organisations helping design and deliver them — are an enabler of economic participation.
- On environmental work across the lifecycle: biodiversity management, environmental monitoring, rehabilitation and closure planning are natural extensions of Traditional Owner knowledge and responsibilities to Country, with potential for long-term careers.
- On documenting Country early: proponents should work with Traditional Owners during exploration and pre-feasibility to record environmental and cultural conditions (photography, videography, drone survey, mapping), building local capability and establishing robust baselines against which rehabilitation and closure can later be measured — a fundamental component of free, prior and informed consent.
- On engagement and PBCs: while recognising the statutory role of Prescribed Bodies Corporate, the participant cautioned against relying on PBCs alone, noting many operate with limited resources; proponents should co-design engagement with PBCs and provide the funding, resources and time for meaningful engagement — empowering PBCs rather than transferring responsibility to them.
- On the full lifecycle: Traditional Owner involvement should extend across exploration, construction, operations, rehabilitation and closure.

SIA key matter	What was said at this location
Community and stakeholder engagement	Partnership-based engagement: proponents should co-design engagement strategies, materials and decision-making with PBCs and resource them to reach the wider Traditional Owner community — empowering PBCs rather than offloading responsibility to them. Documenting Country early, with Traditional Owners, supports genuine free, prior and informed consent.
Workforce management	Employment as a whole-of-life-cycle journey — from school engagement to post-employment transition — not just recruitment. HR frameworks, not cultural-awareness training alone, are the key enabler: flexible policies recognising cultural and kinship obligations, and workplaces where First Nations employees are not treated as token representatives.
Housing and accommodation	Not directly raised by this participant.
Local business and industry procurement	Environmental services across the mine lifecycle — biodiversity, monitoring, rehabilitation and closure — as Traditional Owner-led career and enterprise pathways, supported by vocational training in occupational hygiene, environmental monitoring and related fields.
Health and community well-being	Wellbeing underpins economic participation. Stronger regional primary health and social-and-emotional-wellbeing services — delivered to a standard comparable with other Australian regions, with Traditional Owner organisations involved in design and delivery — are an economic enabler, as many people turn to family, Elders and Traditional Owner organisations rather than conventional services.

YULLUNA PEOPLE (CLONCURRY DISTRICT)

One participant engaged (Yulluna Aboriginal Corporation representative). Findings are attributed to the group consistent with Section 2.5.

SIA key matter	What was said at this location
Community and stakeholder engagement	Trust in negotiation processes is depleted by historical agreements that were not honoured; future engagement is conditional on legally binding commitments negotiated through the group’s own legal representatives. A gap between community expectations and the PBC’s legal remit was described, and is itself a matter proponents should understand when engaging.
Workforce management	No employment pathways are secured through any existing agreement; foundational agreements pre-date the 2014 determination, so no local recruitment obligations attach to established operations. Available work was described as flowing to external subcontractors and FIFO workforces rather than local Traditional Owners.
Housing and accommodation	Not directly raised in this engagement.
Local business and industry procurement	External subcontractors capture available work, and no procurement participation mechanism exists for Yulluna enterprises. Enforceable procurement, employment and training provisions within legally binding agreements were identified as the remedy.
Health and community well-being	Exclusion from economic participation was linked to compounding social and wellbeing pressures in the community, described as widening rather than closing. Education sponsorships supporting up to 70 local school children were noted as the principal current positive contribution, alongside annual Elders support.

H.3 Dajarra (Waluwarra)

Connection to Country. Waluwarra Country centres on the Dajarra district, south of Mount Isa, in CMZ 1. Engagement was undertaken with Waluwarra (and Yirendali) Traditional Owners.

IN THEIR WORDS.

- On self-determination: the central theme was enabling Traditional Owners to manage their own affairs — to establish and run corporations, directors and trust accounts, and to access quality legal, accounting and taxation advice so they can negotiate as equals, so that benefits from agreements reach communities and last generations.
- On biodiversity enterprise: the preferred model was an Indigenous-owned biodiversity company positioned to govern, sign off on methodology and deliver biodiversity studies — plant identification, ecosystems, flora and fauna — combining traditional knowledge with modern science.
- On water: “*water is life for country and culture*” — not just a resource to be divided up. Traditional Owners sought a seat at the table on water allocation, a recognised Indigenous water allocation, and cultural flows to keep rivers and waterholes healthy; risks to artesian springs were described as inadequately addressed.
- On grants versus contracts: government grants were welcomed but should not be the focus — contracts and relationship agreements were described as far better arrangements, giving Traditional Owner entities a greater sense of prosperity and trust.
- On equity: “*real equity can only be measured through a sense of value*” — quotas and targets were described as irrelevant.

- On recognition: recognition was sought for people who hold rights to country under their own law, whether or not native title has been determined — “*traditional ownership isn’t created by a court decision.*”

SIA key matter	What was said at this location
Community and stakeholder engagement	A dedicated cultural-impact lens is needed — cultural impact is distinct from social impact and not fully captured by an SIA. First Nations–targeted education explaining what critical minerals development involves is needed, without which assumptions form. Recognise common-law holders regardless of determination status; prefer enduring contracts and relationship agreements over grants. In the second session this was grounded in statute: the EP Act 1994 (Qld) definition of environment includes cultural conditions, yet cultural value is not recognised as property when remedies are determined, and the reflection of section 28 of the Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld) in the SIA process was queried.
Workforce management	The most substantial opportunity is skilled, on-country work in biodiversity and water-systems management, delivered through Traditional Owner-governed structures. Ranger programs (with QPWS) should be reinstated with Traditional Owners introducing their own people. Education access underpins all pathways; equity is measured through a sense of value, not quotas.
Housing and accommodation	Raised in the second session: housing and home ownership are a priority, constrained by cost and availability. Land tenure remains a barrier, with access to Aboriginal freehold title made difficult by regulation. Young people have limited access to housing and to education on home care and maintenance, and compounding social pressures contribute to overcrowding, with health disparities compounding existing disadvantage.
Local business and industry procurement	The Indigenous-owned biodiversity company is the model — Traditional Owner-governed, holding authority over methodology, delivering surveys and assessments proponents require rather than supplying labour under others’ science. Realising it depends on capacity support (corporations, trusts, affordable professional advice); contracts and relationship agreements, not grants, are the preferred architecture. Commercial use of bush-medicine knowledge must return benefits to knowledge holders.
Health and community well-being	Water is central — life for country and culture, with artesian springs of high cultural value inadequately addressed in current discourse. Cultural flows must be maintained, and Traditional Owners want a genuine seat at water-allocation decisions. Traditional medicine and healing should be kept alive alongside mainstream healthcare; the sense of value from prosperity and gainful employment is a core wellbeing determinant.

H.4 Richmond (Wanamara)

Connection to Country. Wanamara Country lies in the Richmond area of CMZ 2. Engagement was undertaken with a Wanamara Traditional Owner. Wanamara Country is not the subject of a native title determination, and the group’s inclusion reflects the Program’s scope principle that cultural connection and economic stake, not determination status, define who is engaged.

IN THEIR WORDS.

- On engagement scope: engagement must extend to all Traditional Owners — not limited to PBCs and formally determined native title holders; common-law holders and families outside formal structures have the right to be heard and to speak for country.
- On enduring agreements: relationship agreements should run for the term of the mine — a 25-year horizon was referenced — not lapse or reset when governments or proponents change. Past breakaway arrangements and failed revegetation were cited as the cost of transactional dealings.
- On enterprise: opportunities identified included grazing and beef-industry participation (including purchasing cattle properties for Traditional Owner groups), revegetation and ranger contracts, and an Indigenous Engagement Officer embedded in every mine.
- On direct employment: jobs must go to actual Traditional Owners engaged directly by proponents — not to interstate consultants brought in to perform Indigenous engagement or cultural roles on their behalf.
- On cultural recognition: place-making and recognition across the region — welcome signage, cultural awareness material, videography, storytelling and art, and a Keeping Place for knowledge — were sought as vehicles for recognition and to create a sense of connection that draws Traditional Owner families back to the region.

SIA key matter	What was said at this location
Community and stakeholder engagement	Traditional Owners engaged as rights-holders in their own right, through a standing Community Roundtable with locked-in zone representatives, under relationship agreements that endure for the term of the mine. Engagement must reach all Traditional Owners, including common-law holders. Cultural awareness material for proponents and government is itself an engagement tool.
Workforce management	Accredited training with a direct line to real jobs, with onboarding well ahead of construction so local people are ready. Job-seeker and labour-hire pathways are acceptable entry points if they convert to secure employment. Cultural and engagement roles must be filled by Traditional Owners, not external consultants; an embedded Indigenous Engagement Officer and growing ranger numbers were sought.
Housing and accommodation	Raised through education — scholarships tied to college accommodation so young people can take up study without the housing burden falling on families. Relocation must come with involvement and inclusion; planning should anticipate Traditional Owner families returning to the region.
Local business and industry procurement	Entity creation with proper legal support; beef-industry participation including cattle-property acquisition; revegetation and invasive-species contracts; and commissioned art, videography and storytelling procured from Traditional Owner artists rather than outsourced. The test is whether contracts and benefits flow to actual Traditional Owner entities in the region.
Health and community well-being	Hospitals and health services in critical areas are a priority. Wellbeing extends to cultural continuity — a Keeping Place, welcome signage and visible recognition — building the sense of connection that makes it viable for families to return to and remain in the region. Culture-shock support for young people relocating for study or work sits here.

H.5 Waanyi Country (North-West)

Connection to Country. Waanyi Country lies in the north-west of the region, extending toward the Gulf, and includes the area of the Century Mine. Engagement was undertaken with two participants: a Waanyi Traditional Owner and business owner, and a Waanyi Elder originally from Mount Isa, resident in Townsville for 49 years. A recurring theme of this engagement is that many Waanyi people, and Traditional Owners from north-west communities more broadly, now live in regional hubs such as Townsville — which the participant identified as having direct implications for how and where engagement must occur.

IN THEIR WORDS.

- On representation: the participant observed that the representative body has represented family groups rather than all Traditional Owner groups, so some clan groups miss out on employment and compensation, and proposed that a representative body plus an additional community board voted by the people should have the right to sit at the negotiation table.
- On procurement: Waanyi businesses were described as receiving only small work packages of up to six months while contract work is outsourced to non-Indigenous and capital-city firms — in one case, work outsourced past a Waanyi business already hiring machinery to the mining sector.
- On a trust model: a standing trust account — funded by proponents as shareholders to Traditional Owners, alongside government, independent of grant cycles — was proposed to keep Waanyi businesses viable and enable expansion into land care, ranger services, parks and wildlife, and cultural heritage.
- On migration and connection: *“Cloncurry is my country, but Townsville is my home. I prefer to be in my home than on country.”* Families relocate for work, school and hospitals and generally stay, returning to north-west communities mainly for funerals, Christmas and family celebrations.
- On engagement design: *“critical minerals engagement should... include meeting Traditional Owners in locations such as Townsville”* — not only on country — as Townsville is the current hub for health, education, port, sport and families.

IN THEIR WORDS (SECOND PARTICIPANT).

- On pathways for young people: structured routes from school into trade training camps and TAFE were sought, with an Indigenous support person to keep young people focused through training. *“There’s nothing better than having a family member who has a job and goes to work. It shows our young people, this is what a normal family looks like.”*
- On practical barriers: *“Transport is a big issue. If they can’t get there, that automatically leaves them out.”* Stable housing — *“not couch surfing or drifting from one place to another”* — and the cost of licences and tickets such as the White Card were identified as preconditions for work.
- On Sorry Business: the frequency of bereavement in community is often disbelieved by employers — in one month, six people known to or related to the participant passed away. *“If First Nations workers took the amount of time off they genuinely needed, they probably wouldn’t have a job for very long. They also wouldn’t be believed.”* Only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations were observed to embed cultural practice in their constitutions and policies.
- On respect: *“Being listened to, for a start. People also need to be included. Inclusivity is the main thing.”* Token employment was named directly: an organisation that employs one First Nations person and believes it has done its bit.
- On engagement with Elders: approach local Traditional Owners first for permission; sit down properly and without haste; and pay Elders for cultural knowledge — *“it is knowledge that nobody else can give them.”*
- On Country: *“Please leave the place as you found it.”* The destruction of the Juukan Gorge rock shelters was cited as the mistake that must never be repeated: *“we will never get that back.”* Documented cultural sites should be expressly protected.

SIA key matter	What was said at this location
Community and stakeholder engagement	Two default assumptions were challenged: that the representative body is the community (a body-plus-community-board model was proposed), and that engagement happens on country (a growing Traditional Owner population lives in Townsville, Cairns and Brisbane). Meeting Traditional Owners where they live is a practical design requirement, and considerably more engagement is needed on cultural impact and access to critical minerals data. The Elder’s protocol guidance: approach local Traditional Owners first for permission, engage Elders properly and without haste, pay Elders for cultural knowledge, and accept that Custodians are the decision-makers for Country.
Workforce management	Local people are reported passed over for basic jobs in favour of migrant labour, while FIFO workforces affect town cohesion. Getting a job is not the barrier — keeping one is, with no support to sustain employment. A prison-release program back on country, framed as restorative justice, was proposed as a combined workforce and community measure. The Elder added the pre-employment barriers — transport, stable housing, and licence and ticket costs — and workplace treatment of Sorry Business as a structural barrier to retention: bereavement frequency disbelieved, two-day leave inadequate, and cultural practice embedded in policy only within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
Housing and accommodation	Housing operates as an anchor of permanent out-migration: once a family receives a house in Townsville they stay. The question is whether regional housing, health and education can compete with the cities well enough for families to remain or return; housing is named among social issues receiving no support. Stable housing was also identified as a precondition for employment: young people cannot hold work or training while couch-surfing or moving between households.
Local business and industry procurement	Waanyi businesses receive only small, short packages while larger contracts are outsourced, even where local capability exists. The proposed trust model — proponent-funded as shareholders alongside government, independent of grant cycles — would keep businesses viable and enable expansion into land care, ranger services, parks and wildlife, and cultural heritage.
Health and community well-being	A causal chain was described from high unemployment through alcohol misuse, domestic violence, incarceration and early school-leaving, with no support from government or mining companies. Youth justice laws were said to limit Elders’ authority to guide young people; migration compounds loss of cultural connection. Wellbeing measures should fund absent social supports, restore Elder authority, and treat maintaining connection for families living away as a wellbeing outcome. The Elder identified structured after-school activities as preventive investment for young people, employment role-modelling within families as intergenerational wellbeing, and the cumulative grief burden of frequent Sorry Business as a wellbeing matter workplaces must accommodate.

CRITICAL MINERALS QUEENSLAND

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