

The Donald Project Digest



Quarterly update on the Donald Rare Earth and Minerals Sands Project near Minyip.

The Donald Project

BETWEEN the Victorian towns of Minyip and Donald lies the Donald Project, a globally significant deposit of mineral sands and rare earths. The deposit contains critical minerals essential for everyday products and advanced technology, from paint and porcelain to medical implants, smartphones, clean energy, and defence.

ASX-listed Astron Limited and US critical materials producer Energy Fuels Inc are developing the project in a joint venture called Donald Project Pty Ltd, which trades as Donald Mineral Sands (DMS). With a planned mine life of more than 58 years, the Donald Project promises long term benefits to the Wimmera, including:

- Hundreds of jobs during construction and operations
- Sustained economic investment in local business
- New skills and training pathways
- Infrastructure improvements

Two decades in the making

Conzinc Riotinto of Australia Ltd (CRA, now Rio Tinto) explored the Wimmera in the late 1970s looking for coal but, instead, found vast mineral sands deposits containing titanium, zircon, and rare earth minerals. CRA gave up the tenements. By the 2000s, growing global urbanisation and electrification had created strong markets for zircon and rare earth minerals. Astron acquired the tenement rights in 2004.

Now, after more than two decades and \$100 million invested in engineering, design, land and water acquisition, and environmental and heritage studies, the project is on the cusp of construction. DMS expects to take a final investment decision (FID) by the end of 2026. Construction would then follow with first production in 2028. According to Resources Victoria, fewer than one per cent of exploration projects go on to become established mines. The Donald Project has come further than most.

Laying the groundwork

AHEAD of a final investment decision on the Donald Project, we've prepared the site for construction. That includes installing the 14 km water pipeline to site, and early site work, such as fencing and site clearing. We've also procured key parts for the processing plant, including the spirals that will separate the mineral sands.

To build and operate safely we have had to clear some native vegetation, including Buloke woodland, a threatened ecological community. We removed less than half the amount permitted under our original Federal approval. To compensate, we have secured two offset sites permanently protecting almost 29 hectares of Buloke woodland. We will actively manage these sites, improving them over time by reducing weeds and pests, and restoring canopy and understorey species. We'll publish the results of our efforts annually on the DMS website.

[Read the Biodiversity Offset Management Plan here.](#)

Opportunity knocks

THE Donald Project will create opportunities for jobseekers and suppliers alike.

Over its mine life, we estimate the project will support more than 500 direct and indirect jobs. We believe our long-term success depends on employing people who'll call the Wimmera home. So, we'll prioritise qualified candidates who live in, or are willing to relocate to, the region. Job opportunities will come in two phases.

Construction jobs will span civil works, structural and mechanical installation, electrical and instrumentation, and site services. Our contractors, which we'll list on the DMS website when appointed, will recruit directly for these roles.

Operations will require about 160 positions across technical services, production, maintenance and engineering, health, safety and environment, and human resources. DMS will employ about half directly, our contractors the other half.

For suppliers, we launched a Donald Project Industry Capability Network Gateway page earlier this year. There, companies can register their interest and credentials for current and future work packages. Almost 300 have already.

[Send us your CV](#)

[Register as a supplier](#)



~160
Direct jobs



+536 FTE
Average annual employment uplift of
+536 FTE in the local project region.



\$200 m
Net increase in gross
regional product

Working with the Wotjobaluk Nations Peoples

IN February, we reached a *Journey and Understanding Agreement* (JaUA) with the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC), which represents the Traditional Owners of the land on which the Donald Project sits: the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia, and Jupagulk Peoples.

The Peoples of the Wotjobaluk Nations are the Native Title Holders for land and waters along Barringgi Gadyin (the Wimmera River). Their Country extends from Gariwerd (the Grampians) through to Ngalpakatia/Ngelpagutya (Lake Albacutya) and beyond into sandhill country. The agreement sets out how we'll work together and build understanding.

In August, we finalised a new project *Cultural Heritage Management Plan*, providing an updated and stronger framework for protecting cultural heritage on site.

 [Read about the JaUA](#)

First meeting of the Environmental Review Committee

WE held the first meeting of the Donald Project Environmental Review Committee (ERC) in June. The ERC brings together community members, the BGLC, and regulators to evaluate the project's environmental performance against the Victorian Government-approved work plan. Five community members joined the committee following a region-wide campaign for nominations.

The ERC is a commitment under the project's Environment Effects Statement and meets under an independent chairperson and formal Terms of Reference. When nominations opened earlier this year, Grant Huggins, DMS GM Operations, said "the community will be the yardstick of our performance".

 [Learn more about the ERC](#)

Meeting the next generation

FOR many, the mineral sands industry is a bit of a mystery, despite the ubiquity of critical minerals in our everyday lives. So, we're always open to opportunities to share information about the sector, especially with the next generation.

In April, we hosted a site visit by Horsham College Year 12 geography students studying land use change. They arrived with questions aplenty, from local jobs and land access to rehabilitation, water security, and how we keep the community informed. The class also designed and ran their own community survey about the project.

We're grateful to the students and their teacher for their interest.



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In the community

WE are always open to talking about the Donald Project. Drop in weekdays at the Minyip office or join one of our monthly *Coffee on Us* sessions at Emma's at Cooper's Crossing Garage Café, in Minyip.

We're also active at community events. This year for example we've spoken to the local Probus group and hosted a DMS stall at the:

- Wimmera Machinery Field Days
- Getting Wimmera Mallee Mining Ready forum
- Western Victoria Careers Expo
- Ballarat Jobs and Training Expo

Anticipating a positive FID, we'll host more DMS community information sessions. If you're interested in the project, find us using whatever channel suits you best.



DMS stall at the Western Victoria Careers Expo

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The Donald Project

Between Minyip and Donald, we're planning to develop one of the world's largest deposits of mineral sands and rare earth elements — critical minerals for modern life. For the Wimmera, this will mean local investment, new jobs, and infrastructure improvements benefitting our community for decades to come.